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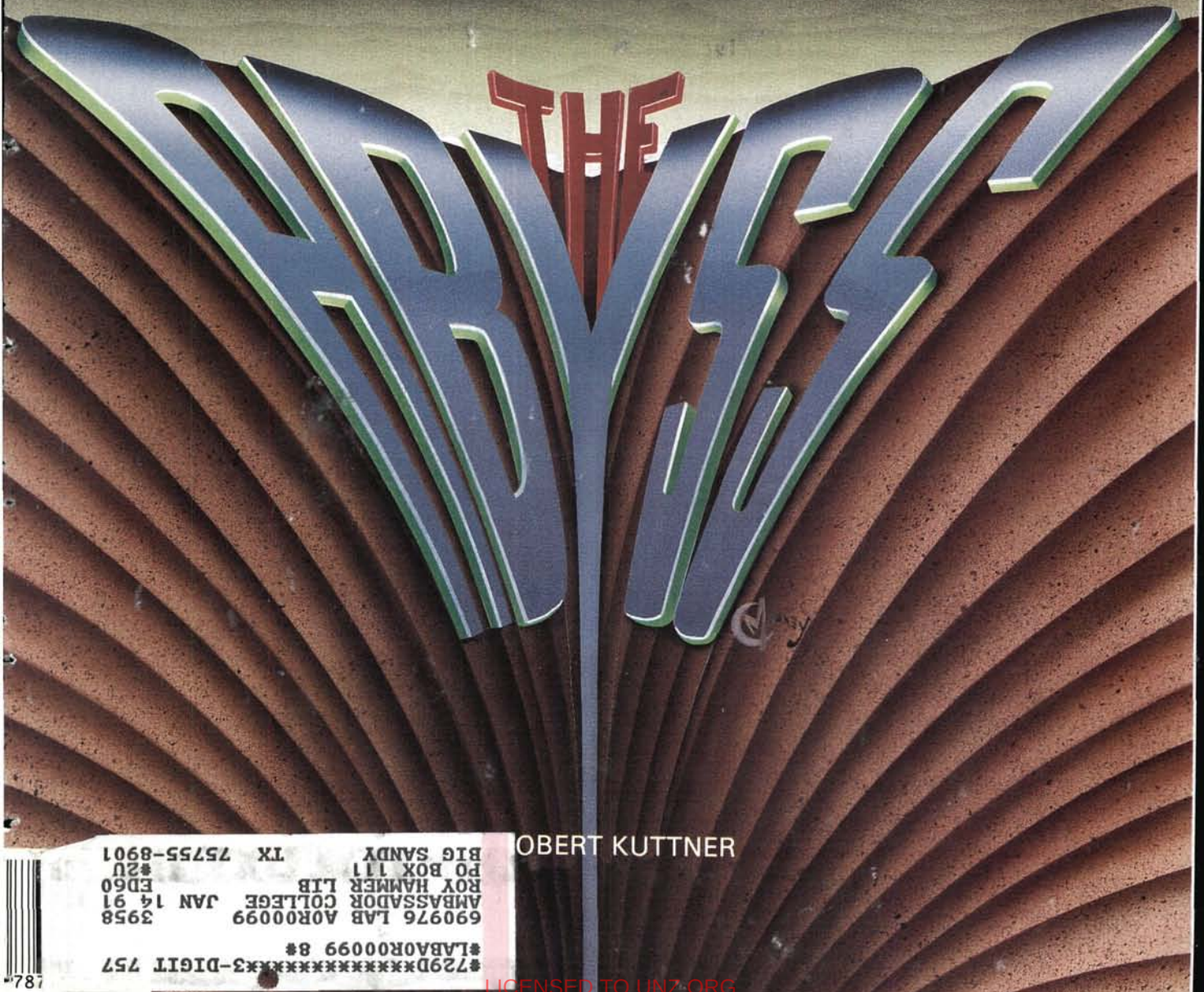

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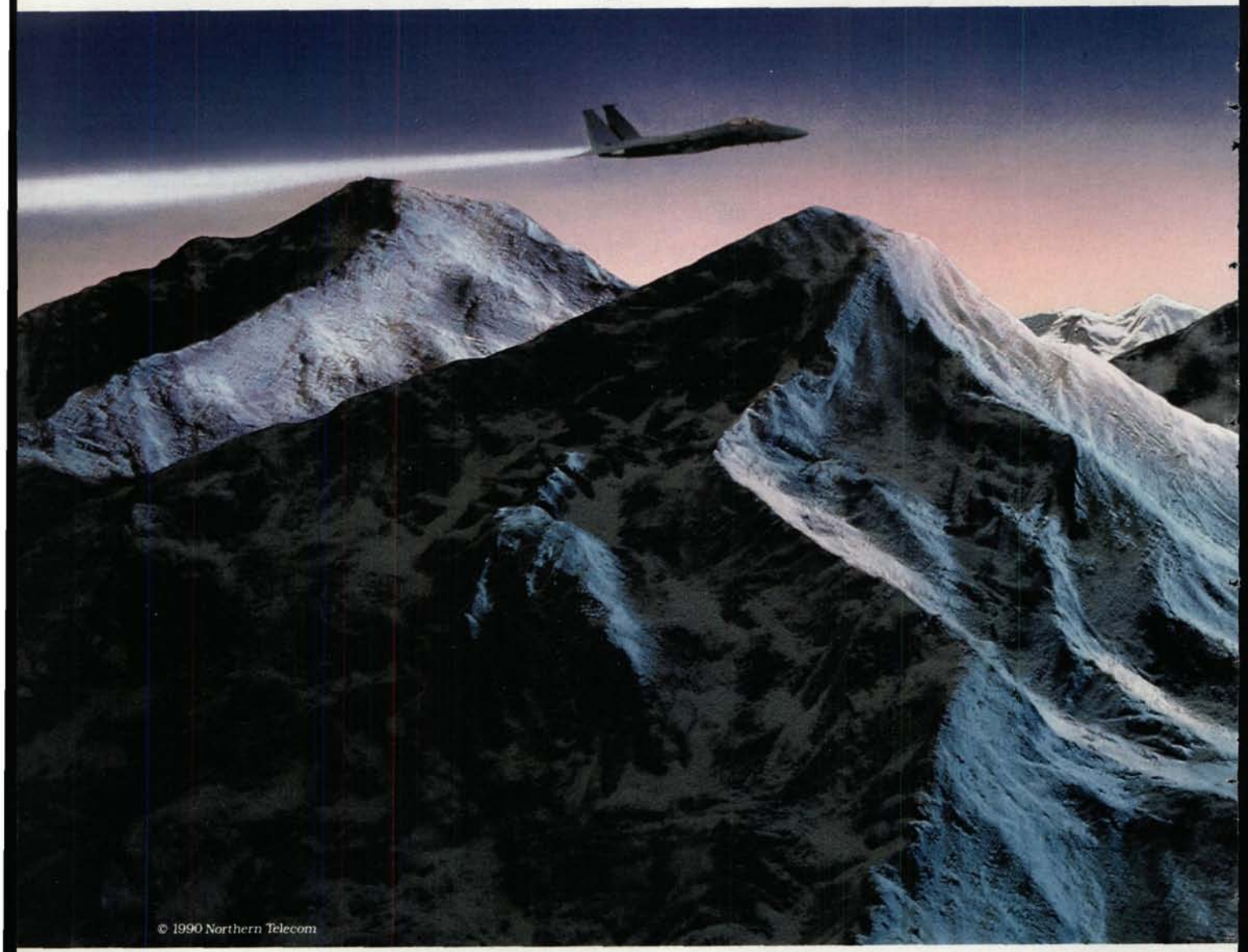

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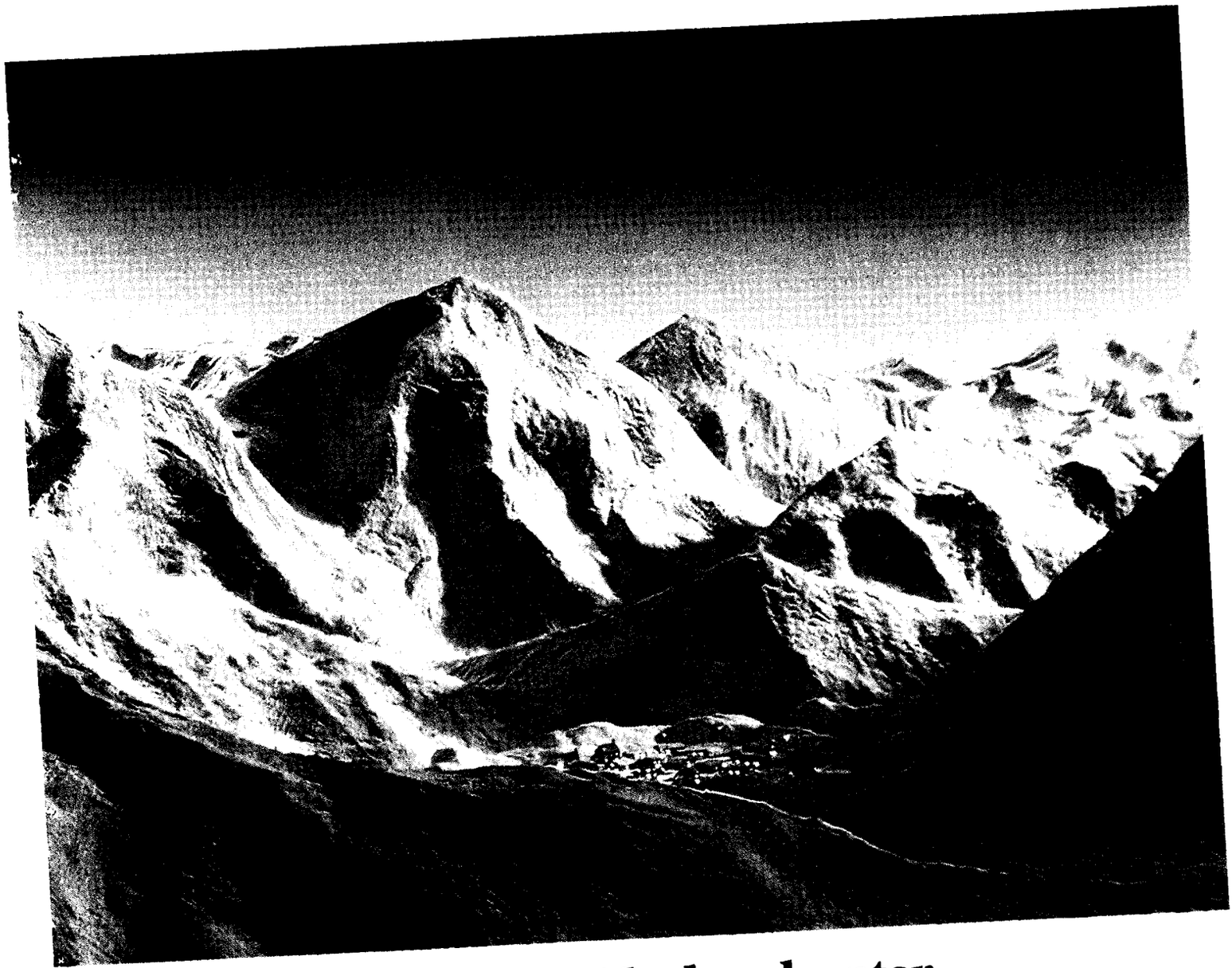

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TRB®
FROM WASHINGTON

Capital Pain

We have reached a nadir of dishonesty in the budget debate when Republicans justify their opposition to cuts in Medicare benefits by defining such cuts as a "tax increase on the elderly." We also have reached a nadir of illogic when Democrats propose to exchange higher top-bracket tax rates for a cut in the capital gains tax.

Although the rich should certainly pay more taxes, there is nothing wonderful about higher tax rates as such. In fact, the supply-siders are right that higher tax rates discourage economic activity. There are plenty of ways to sock the rich *without* raising marginal rates—by closing loopholes instead. Senate Finance Committee chairman Lloyd Bentsen's idea of raising the so-called alternative minimum tax—the tax you pay if you take too many deductions—is a good technique for doing this through the back door.

To raise marginal rates and then give back the money in the form of a capital gains break is doubly crazy. Fairness aside, the problem with a capital gains break is that it violates the principle of tax neutrality—letting the market, rather than tax considerations, dictate economic decisions. Neutrality is a good capitalist notion: it holds that the free market knows better than the government how resources can be used most efficiently.

To see the waste of non-neutrality, you need merely look out your window, if you work in a major downtown area. All those empty "see-through" buildings and "office space for lease" signs are partly the result of the perverse incentives—including the capital gains break—built into the tax code from the first "supply-side" tax bill of 1978 through tax reform in 1986.

Coupling a cut in the tax on capital gains with an increase in tax rates on ordinary income makes the distorting effect even worse. The dirty little secret of people such as real estate developers is that they *like* higher basic tax rates—provided there are loopholes. The bigger the gap between the tax on ordinary income and the tax on favored forms of income, such as capital gains, the bigger the opportunity to create tax shelters. Many of the Democratic Party's biggest contributors and fund-raisers are in exactly the lines of business—real estate, oil and gas, entertainment—that would benefit most from combining a higher top tax rate with a new capital gains break. I say no more.

The New York Times advocates "a tax cut that is limited to new investment in venture capital and other risky start-up companies." Many others are tempted by the idea of sorting out the "new" or "risky" investments and only giving a tax break to these. But the problems of definition—and the certainty that clever lawyers will bend them out of shape—merely illustrate the conceptual fallacy. Why give a break to a new company but not to an established firm that wishes to branch out into a new product line? And so on.

Actually, the tax code already gives a big break to capital gains, compared with other forms of investment income. Capital gains accrue tax-free until you choose to liquidate the investment. By contrast, you pay tax on your interest income every year. It's a big difference. On an investment yielding 10 percent annually and held for twenty years, the after-tax profit is almost 50 percent larger if it's a capital gain. And capital gains on investments held when you die escape tax completely—a $5 billion annual loophole.

To index capital gains for inflation—another frequent suggestion—would increase the bias against other forms of investment. Like a capital gain, interest income is partly just compensation for the erosion of your principal. And if you start indexing the tax on profits for inflation, you also should index the deduction for borrowing costs. Part of the interest paid on debts also compensates for the erosion of principal. If people can borrow money and deduct all the interest, then invest it but pay tax only on the profit above inflation, they are going to screw up the economy and the federal treasury but good.

Then there is the question of capital losses. Some people—most notably the editors of *The Wall Street Journal*—argue that the limit on deducting capital losses makes the tax on capital gains unfair. Here we reach the farthest shores of capital gains dementia. Watch closely. Capital losses are fully deductible each year against capital gains of the same year. Beyond that, you can deduct up to $3,000 a year of capital losses against your ordinary income. And you can "carry forward" any losses beyond $3,000 for use in future years.

So ask yourself: Who is hurt by the limit on capital losses? Two groups come to mind. First there are those who, year after year, lose more than $3,000 on their in-

continued on page 41

Crazy policies

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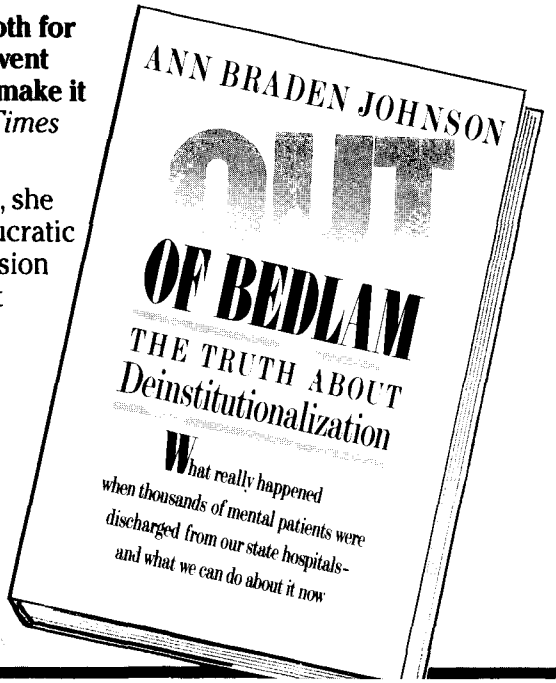

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

A Weekly Journal of Opinion

OCTOBER 29, 1990

FOUNDED 1914
WASHINGTON, D.C.
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CORRESPONDENCE

Regressive art

To the editors:

It is ironic that in the same issue Michael Kinsley worries about regressive tax policies and pooh-poohs capital gains tax cuts because they shift the tax burden from rich to poor, the editorial "Art Appreciation" (October 8) concludes that Congress should reauthorize the NEA.

Taxing everyone so money can be spent on art that only a fraction of the population enjoys is redistributing the wealth in favor of those consuming the arts, which happens to be the wealthier classes. Your examples of who tends to get NEA grants—symphony orchestras, theater companies, ballet troupes—confirm that the wealthier classes benefit.

And after suggesting that a great artist like James Joyce could run afoul of NEA guidelines, you ask, "What good government, committed to the freedom of its society and to the happiness of its citizens, would *not* want to help Joyce finish *Ulysses*?" The masses aren't devouring Joyce's fiction, and they won't buy the argument that somehow they benefit by helping to pay for artistic works they care nothing about. Anyway, you admit that *Ulysses* was not funded by government grants, so there are better questions to ask: How is it that America produced so many great artists before either the WPA in the 1930s or the NEA, created in 1965? Where is the James Joyce of today?

TIM GRACYK
San Jose, California

The writer is professor of English at Santa Clara University.

Computer error

To the editors:

In "Computer Trouble" (September 10 & 17) Jacob Weisberg details a conspiracy theory that holds that, during the previous administration, the Department of Justice tried to force INSLAW, a computer software company, into bankruptcy so that a friend of then Attorney General Edwin Meese could acquire INSLAW's software "at auction" and therefore "get lucrative computer contracts with the Justice Department, ultimately including Project Eagle . . ." The simple fact is that the firm alleged to have conspired with Meese never bid on Project Eagle and therefore was never a contender for the contract.

Both the department's Office of Professional Responsibility and the Criminal Division reviewed the allegations and found them without merit. The attorney general has directed the full cooperation of the department with the House Judiciary Committee on a new investigation of both the INSLAW case and Project Eagle. At a hearing on May 16 committee chairman Jack Brooks thanked the attorney general for fully cooperating with the committee and providing access to requested records and employees. The department has provided literally truckloads of requested materials. That is not "stonewalling."

HARRY H. FLICKINGER
Washington, D.C.

The writer is assistant attorney general for administration at the Department of Justice.

To the editors:

Jacob Weisberg writes that, shortly into the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigation's inquiry into the INSLAW matter, an alleged informant within the Department of Justice contacted Senate Judiciary Committee investigator Ronald Legrand. Weisberg writes that the informant said "he would come forward, as would other career officials in the Criminal Division who know about the conspiracy—but only if they were assured of protection against reprisals, and put under oath. Legrand was never asked for his informant's name."

In fact, when the subcommittee staff learned from William Hamilton, president of INSLAW, that he had been told by Legrand of the existence of a confidential source within the department, the staff immediately called Legrand to confirm the statements that Hamilton had attributed to both Legrand and this alleged source. Legrand confirmed the existence of this source, as well as the source's alleged statements about the role of the Justice Department in creating INSLAW's problems.

Legrand never told the subcommittee staff that his source was willing to come forward, or that there were other knowledgeable officials within the Criminal Division who would come forward. What Legrand did say was that his source had identified to him three senior career officials within the Criminal Division who "may know, or would have been in a position to know" what had happened to INSLAW. As a result of this information, the subcommittee staff interviewed the three officials identified by Legrand's source. All three stated that they had no knowledge of any conspiracy against INSLAW, or of any improper activity on the part of Deputy Attorney General D. Lowell Jensen with respect to INSLAW.

Furthermore, contrary to Weisberg's statement that "Legrand was never asked for his informant's name," the subcommittee staff made repeated requests of Legrand not only for the identity of his source, but also for the opportunity to speak directly with the source. Despite these requests, the subcommittee staff was told by Legrand that the source was unwilling to speak directly with the staff. Moreover, Legrand himself was unable ever to obtain any more specific information from his source with respect to how Jensen, or anyone else within the department, had allegedly "engineered" INSLAW's problems.

In light of the staff's inability to corroborate the source's identity, and in the face of the denials by the specific officials identified by the source, the staff was left with no choice but to consider the source's information as unsubstantiated allegations. Had Weisberg contacted the subcommittee, the staff would have been happy to inform him of these facts.

SAM NUNN
Washington, D.C.

The writer, a U.S. senator from Georgia, is chairman of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations.

To the editors:

Jacob Weisberg suggests that the law firm of Dickstein, Shapiro & Morin conducted itself improperly in connection with its representation of INSLAW in INSLAW's dispute with the Department of Justice. Eighteen months ago, after a full trial in which I was lead counsel, a U.S. Bankruptcy Court rejected those very charges. In that opinion, which is reported in volume 97 of the *Bankruptcy Reporter* but is not even referred to in Weisberg's article, the court held that the charges of INSLAW and its president, William Hamilton, were "built upon supposition, suspicion, and uncorroborated hearsay, all of which are unworthy of belief." In fact, the court directed INSLAW to pay legal fees incurred by DS&M in "rebutting the unproven aspersions upon its reputation," in an amount ultimately set at $90,000.

The court ruled, among other determinations laudatory of DS&M, that: "[DS&M's] representation of [INSLAW] was undertaken and maintained in good faith; the quality of its services rendered was first-rate and beneficial to [INSLAW]; [DS&M's] actions on behalf of [INSLAW] were properly motivated at all times; . . ."

After a full investigation, the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations similarly exonerated DS&M. It was irresponsible and fundamentally unfair that the article did not refer either to judicial findings based on sworn testimony or to the fact that the Senate essentially concurred with the court's conclusions.

ROBERT J. HIGGINS
Washington, D.C.

The writer is a partner with Dickstein, Shapiro & Morin.

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

OCTOBER 29, 1990

DOME OF THE ROCKS

Those Palestinians in Jerusalem who summoned a mob to the Temple Mount, or the Harim al Sharif as it is called in Arabic, on October 8 say that their purpose was to defend the mosque from Jews pledged to place upon this disputed holy site the cornerstone for a future Third Temple. There are such Jews in Jerusalem—an infinitesimal number, by the way—with precisely such hopes and precisely such intentions. From time to time these Jews have made forays to this site where, it is said, Abraham prepared Isaac for sacrifice and Muhammad ascended on his white steed to heaven. But Israeli law and the police who enforce it have almost always stopped them. Even in a government of the right, these religious millenarians have almost no friends, and the orthodox establishments of various Jewish theological illuminations despise them. On the dark day in question, in any case, Israeli force had kept them about a mile away.

But the Palestinians assembled on the Mount for a confrontation; and when the Jewish zealots they had hoped to confront failed to appear, the mob did what it had been mustered to do. Its members hurled down rocks and bottles at the more than fifteen thousand Jews gathered for the prayers of Succoth (or the Feast of Tabernacles) at the Western Wall below them. These were not demonstrators; they were a mob intent on shedding Jewish blood. The Israeli police responded, of course, and the mob, now three thousand strong and growing (because the loudspeaker at the mosque was calling for *jihad*, or holy war), turned on them. Outnumbered and ill-equipped, the police opened fire. At the end of the tragic day, twenty-two Arabs were dead, dozens more wounded.

President Bush expressed sorrow, which was appropriate. The temperature in the Middle East was feverish enough, and this violence in the sacred precincts of two faiths only raises it. But the president did not stop at sorrow. He also had an analysis, and his analysis began and ended with a criticism of Israel. Would he have preferred that the Israeli police had not succeeded in stopping the Palestinian mob in its tracks? Oh yes, he also called for guarantees of free access to the holy sites of Jerusalem. This was an egregious escalation of his previous verbal mischief about Jerusalem. In modern times free access to the places of prayer has never been more scrupulously maintained than under the Israelis in the years since the Six-Day War of 1967. (More scrupulously, certainly, than it was when the president's—and Saddam Hussein's—friend King Hussein ruled the Old City and kept it altogether free of Jews, while also restricting the building and upkeep of Christian churches.) As it happens, the only people now kept from praying where they want to in Jerusalem are exactly those Jewish chiliasts of the Temple Mount whom Jewish soldiers don't permit to come close.

Perhaps Bush felt he had to raise the phony issue of free access to holy places to placate the Arab states at our side in the Gulf. They, of course, will feel the need to mount a hysterical outcry against the Israelis, lest Saddam Hussein and his PLO allies win an advantage in the politics of the Arab street. But Bush did not stop there. The man who has staked his place in history on his opposition to the appeasement of Baghdad (he is a reformed appeaser, in fact) proceeded to appease Riyadh by asking the U.N. Security Council to approve a resolution condemning Israel for "excessive force." As Paul Lewis of *The New York Times* reported, the president "moved swiftly to take the lead." According to Thomas Friedman of the *Times*, the president's public actions "did not begin to express his private anger."

Does the president grasp that he is playing into Saddam Hussein's hands? The Iraqi plan to escape the American noose, after all, consists of one thing: linkage. If Hussein persuades Bush that his occupation of Kuwait is no different from the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, and that such an equivalence is the basis for a solution to the crisis in the Gulf, then Hussein has won. Bush has not yet explicitly pronounced on linkage, but there were signs that he saw something in the notion even prior to the awful event in Jerusalem. Now the notion has his "private anger" going for it.

Does the president grasp, moreover, that the success

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of Palestinian extremism is the success of Saddam Hussein? The Palestinian radicals who assembled on the mountain to have a fight are some of Iraq's biggest boosters in the Arab world. The United States cannot tilt toward those radicals without strengthening precisely the forces in the Arab world who stand against the United States in the Gulf. The Israeli policemen who fired into the Palestinian crowd also played into Iraq's hands, to be sure; they made the case for the rescue of the Palestinians by a strongman seem more plausible in the Palestinian world. George Bush may be expected, however, to react a little more reflectively, to see that his move in the United Nations is a sure sign that he is dividing American policy in the Middle East against itself. Or does Bush really, "privately," believe that the strategic and economic interests of the United States are more confidently secure by its relationship with Saudi Arabia than its relationship with Israel? Is the president really prepared to tilt away from the only society in the region with whom the United States has a natural moral and political affinity toward the least legitimate and most fragile regimes on earth? Is our presence in the desert motivated by an affirmation of America's moral and strategic principles or an abandonment of them?

The Palestinians in Jerusalem, meanwhile, may have begun to congratulate themselves on having finally tossed the match into the barn. They seem not to have noticed that they are in the barn themselves. We seem to be witnessing, as a result of the petering out of the intifada and the excitement in the Gulf, a new swelling of Palestinian maximalism. The best-known putative Palestinian moderate, Faisal Husseini, was present on the mountain during the violence. He is not a man normally seen in a place of public prayer on a day that is not a special day of prayer. Whatever he was doing there, it is clear that the stoning of Jews at worship was not a spontaneous event. No doubt the Palestinian leadership did not exactly desire the deaths of their own. But what on earth did they think would happen when rocks instead of blessings fell from heaven on the praying Jews below? This was not a political protest, it was a provocation, and it was perfectly consistent with the aims of Palestinian politics during this crisis: to polarize, to intimidate, to invite a final problem-solving war.

In Jerusalem a few days ago, the policy of Israeli restraint went awry. So the Palestinians and the Iraqis have won a victory of sorts. They have, at the very least, reminded the world of their grievance. (The world seemed to have transferred its affections to the Kuwaitis.) And the Iraqis have, at the very least, earned a little reprieve from the world's enmity, which has been diversified. French President François Mitterrand, the *marchand de mort* who blandly helped arm Iraq despite its record on human rights, was insolent enough to reproach the Israelis for violating human rights in this instance of a police response to unprovoked mayhem. Another U.N. condemnation of Israel is in the cards; and nobody is especially surprised that this time the U.S. is sponsoring it. And the incoherence of American policy in the Middle East mounts by orders of magnitude.

NOTEBOOK

ZERO TOLERANCE: Is everyone at Dartmouth crazy? On Yom Kippur there appeared an issue of the right-wing *Dartmouth Review* bearing a passage from *Mein Kampf* in place of the paper's usual Teddy Roosevelt credo. Assuming the worst, Dartmouth's liberal community seized the opportunity to get all overwrought about the unpleasant opposition weekly. President James Freedman charged the paper's editors with an "act of moral cowardice" and "vicious hatred." This would have been fair comment if Mr. Freedman had any evidence that the editors of the paper included the Hitler quotation intentionally. He had none (though it is hard to believe they have no idea who was responsible). The *Review*'s editors denied everything, but their "apology" was so mock-Hitlerian in tone as to create the suspicion that it was intended sarcastically ("The human filth that placed this trash in our newspaper made a mockery of this Credo. . . . This cancer amongst our ranks, we assure you, will be sought out and thoroughly punished"). Shortly thereafter, *Review* alumnus and trustee Dinesh D'Souza appeared on campus to head an "investigation," which he kicked off with fine impartiality by calling the incident "Dartmouth's Tawana Brawley case," and President Freedman "the Al Sharpton of academia." Ah, the sublime clash of ideas. Perhaps cooler heads will eventually prevail, but for the moment Dartmouth's skull has gone numb.

THANKS FOR CLEARING THAT UP:

CLARIFICATION

House Minority Whip Newt Gingrich's critical remarks in a recent memorandum quoted in The Washington Times yesterday were not aimed specifically at Democrats participating in the ongoing budget talks His comment about "sick, pathetic, liberal, incompetent, tax-spending traitors" was directed at Democrats in general.

—*The Washington Times*, September 19

WELCOME WAGON: With this issue Andrew Sullivan rejoins THE NEW REPUBLIC as Deputy Editor. An Associate Editor here from 1987 to 1989, Sullivan had left to complete a Ph.D. in government at Harvard. His elegant and forceful writing is familiar to readers not only of this journal but also of *Esquire* and, in his native England, of *The Daily Telegraph*. Also this week, Jacob Weisberg joins our roster of Senior Editors, and Robert Wright begins a leave of absence to write a book—though he remains on our masthead and, if he doesn't mind a bit of sentiment, in our hearts. •

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Clearing the air, indulgently.

POLLUTION ABSOLUTION

By Eugene J. McCarthy

It was certain to come: the application of indulgences to environmental regulation. The venerable ecclesiastical concept of indulgences is the essence of a certain provision in the 1990 Clean Air Act, still in House-Senate conference, that would place a cap on total sulfur dioxide emissions allowed from all U.S. utilities. Each utility would then be given a share of the national pollution allowance. Any utility that does not pollute up to its allowed amount would be permitted to sell the unused part to one that is polluting above its quota or that wishes to do so. Emission credits could be saved against future need, and in the meantime carried as an asset, in effect accomplishing what *The Washington Post* has described as "monetizing dirt."

There have been intimations of this in such policies as allowing companies and persons to sell their losses and permitting the sale of unused investment credits and depletion allowances, but the new Clean Air Act takes the idea an important step further by creating a market for vice and virtue. The potential for extension of this practice raises interesting possibilities. One can conceive of a society in which every person is allowed a level of irresponsible social activity, with the concomitant possibility of being rewarded for good performance by being allowed to sell or transfer the unused portion of his or her quota of anti-social behavior. Thus if a person were allowed, say, twenty points of traffic violations, or a quantum of violence equivalent to two punches in the nose, and had used none or only a portion of these allowances, he or she might sell the unused points or punches to someone who had exceeded the twenty-point limit, or had become involved in a barroom brawl. As another example, the lenient treatment the law affords first offenders might be sold or transferred to second offenders. Thus an overall level of corruption, of crime, and of uncivil behavior could be established for the whole society, with good behavior capitalized and marketed within the limits allowed. Since the aggregate limit would be marginally lowered each year, society, presumably, would benefit.

This would be consistent with the practice of giving or selling indulgences, which operated in the Middle Ages on the principle that some persons were better than they needed to be in order to escape temporal or purgatorial punishments, whereas many others, known as sinners, fell short. Under the terms of the granting of indulgences, credits built up by the good could be transferred to those who had fallen short, or even to those who anticipated falling short. The transfer could be gratuitous, it could be in answer to prayers and petitions, or it could be for money. The anticipation of credits for forgiveness of sin, according to the record, moved William of Aquitaine to establish the monastery of Cluny with the instruction that the monks pray continuously for his salvation while he went about his work of war, pillage, rapine, and other activities. This procedure is perfectly echoed in an amendment to the Senate's version of the Clean Air bill, which would allow, for example, the aerospace industry in California to buy from a local supervisory authority pollution rights in excess of its allotted amount and then allow the authority to use the money to subsidize or pay for pollution reduction somewhere else in the region, by some other person or company.

It should perhaps be remembered, however, that the sale of indulgences did not serve the Church well—nor, in the long run, as the record shows, did it discourage sinners.

EUGENE J. MCCARTHY, the former U.S. senator from Minnesota, is a poet and essayist.

WHITE HOUSE WATCH

KNIVES OUT

By Fred Barnes

Cabinet meetings at the Bush White House are normally lovefests, but not the one on October 5. It was hastily convened after the budget agreement endorsed by President Bush had been defeated in the House earlier that day. Bush was shaken. Cabinet secretaries were anxious, especially those who'd once been House members. There was an undercurrent of disgust with the bipartisan budget strategy—devised by budget director Richard Darman and promoted by John Sununu, Bush's chief of staff—that had led to the crushing defeat. But the criticism was oblique. Veterans Secretary Edward Derwinski and Deputy Energy Secretary Henson Moore (substituting for his boss, James Watkins) said Bush should reunite with renegade House Republicans. Agriculture Secretary Clayton Yeutter urged Bush not to tilt to the left and accept a Democratic budget. Vice President Dan Quayle and Sununu argued over whether Bush should veto legislation that would keep the federal government operating temporarily (Quayle wanted a veto, Sununu didn't).

The Bush administration isn't fun anymore, even for

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Bush. He was thunderstruck when many of his longtime allies abandoned him on the budget deal—Henry Hyde of Illinois, Sonny Callahan of Alabama, John Myers of Indiana, Bob Dornan of California. He was forced to make repeated pleas to Bill Archer, the Republican who holds Bush's old House seat in Houston. And in several phone calls he leaned on John Paul Hammerschmidt of Arkansas, probably his best friend in the House. Archer and Hammerschmidt voted for the deal. But "it was like pulling teeth," Bush groused at the Cabinet meeting. "The president seemed perturbed," said a White House official.

Bush was lucky to do as well as he did in the House vote. Before his lobbying campaign, only twenty-five or thirty Republicans were inclined to vote for the bipartisan budget package. Bush got that up to seventy-one (out of 176). He was also lucky that Jack Kemp, his secretary of housing and urban development, didn't quit. Kemp hated the budget deal, and some backers of his 1988 presidential bid urged him to resign in protest. Kemp's old House allies, GOP Whip Newt Gingrich of Georgia and Vin Weber of Minnesota, advised him to stick it out. When Bush phoned Kemp and asked him to endorse the package, Kemp said he couldn't; the best he could do was promise not to lead a charge against the deal. Bush was happy to get this assurance. But then Kemp singled out Gingrich for praise at a New York banquet on October 7, applauding him for pushing the capital gains tax cut.

Bush's cool, decisive style in the Persian Gulf crisis was absent in the budget fight. For the first time there was disarray, vindictiveness, serious backbiting, and fickle behavior at the White House. At the Cabinet meeting Quayle argued that Bush should veto the "continuing resolution" that would keep the government going for two more weeks, while a new budget is concocted. That would bind Bush to congressional Republicans again (they'd try to sustain his veto) and boost the president's leverage. Besides, said Quayle, it would look feckless if Bush simply declined to sign the bill without vetoing it. Sununu countered by saying a veto would be disastrous because it couldn't be sustained. If that happened, Bush would be further weakened.

Though Treasury Secretary Nick Brady sided with Quayle, Sununu won the argument. Shortly before 11 p.m., Press Secretary Marlin Fitzwater announced that Bush would "not sign a continuing resolution . . . which simply delays once again the most serious constitutional responsibility of government—to manage the people's money." But the next morning Bush got word from Senate Republican leader Bob Dole that a veto could be sustained. Bush changed his mind, and wandered out to the driveway by the West Wing to tell reporters of his decision. He talked tough, acting as if a veto had always been his intention. Then he blurred his message by saying that he wouldn't acquiesce or compromise anymore and also that "I remain in a flexible frame of mind." I don't think Bush misspoke. My guess is he thinks he can be rigid and flexible at the same time. Indeed, on the morning of October 9 he compromised and said he'd go along with an income tax hike. In the afternoon he firmly rejected it.

When Bush makes a decision that requires action in Congress, the usual procedure is to notify Republican leaders. Not this time. Gingrich learned of the decision from CNN. Bush and senior officials at the White House weren't talking to him. Sununu was in a snit because Gingrich hadn't knuckled under and backed the budget deal. Darman was in no mood to consult Gingrich, and the feeling was mutual. Gingrich calls Darman "Bush's domestic Kissinger," an administration official who splits Republicans. Gingrich and his allies communicated with the White House circuitously—through other House members or by back channels through lower Bush aides. "Distrust is running high," a White House official said.

In the press, Sununu took the blame for the klutzy White House effort, and he deserved some. Three days before the budget vote he flew into a rage when informed that Robert Walker of Pennsylvania, a key Gingrich lieutenant in the House, had said Sununu wasn't a good Republican. Sununu mused aloud that perhaps the White House should support Walker's Democratic opponent this fall. Naturally word got back to Walker. The situation was smoothed over when Walker called Sununu, said he'd never criticized him that way, and offered to gather GOP conservatives in his office to hear Sununu's pitch on the budget. Sununu agreed, and wound up talking to a dozen House members. He failed to win over a single one.

Sununu was victim of a favorite hypocrisy of Washington reporters. Officials are told they've got to be willing to play political hardball. But when they do—and reporters get wind of it—they get zinged. In a front-page *Washington Post* story Sununu was trashed for having yanked Kennedy Center tickets from a Republican representative who bolted on the budget, and was called boorish for having upset Democrats by insisting on more spending cuts. Are Democrats now so sensitive that they can't stomach the give-and-take of negotiations?

The problem at the White House isn't Sununu. It's Bush. He has an amazingly weak grasp of domestic policy. He's not turned on by it, as he is by foreign policy. Besides, foreign policy is easier. He can sign up a few foreign leaders behind something, and it's a done deal. On the budget he signed up top congressional leaders (minus Gingrich), and the deal was undone. At his press conference on October 9, Bush confessed that he doesn't "rejoice every time I go up and talk to Danny Rostenkowski, my dear friend, about what he's going to do on taxes." But putting together the coalition against Iraq, he said, was downright enjoyable.

I don't think the Bush administration is sinking. But there's a new mood: edgy, sour, and defensive. You could see it when Bush showed up on October 8 to swear in David Souter, a ceremony that should have been joyful. Bush, clearly distracted, called Souter "the first Supreme Court of this presidency." He caught himself and added, "appointment of this presidency." No one laughed. •

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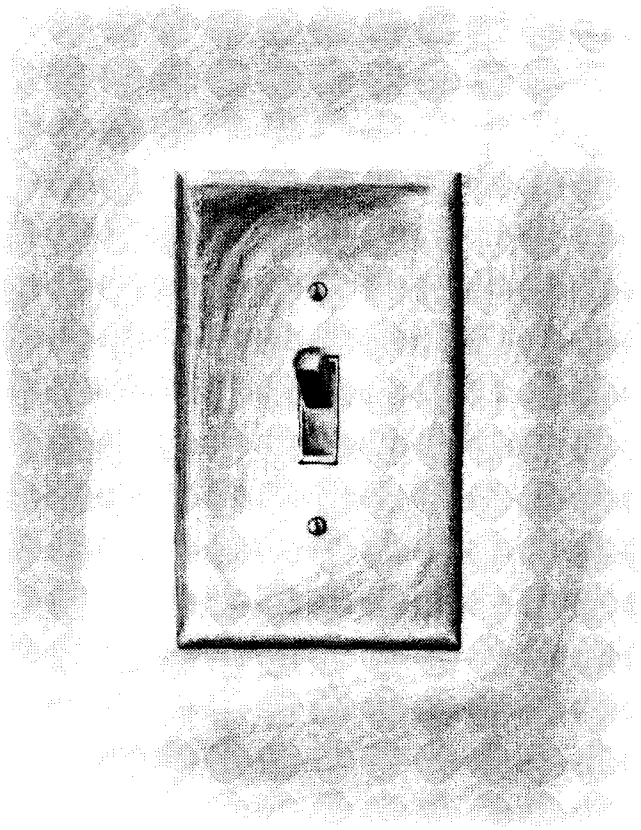

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The Soviet Union's aspirin famine.

SPLITTING HEADACHE

By Sarah Helmstadter

"Don't Get Sick, There Are No Medicines," advised a headline in a recent edition of the Soviet newsweekly *Soyuz* (Union). Reporters had scouted the availability of medicines in pharmacies around the country, and their gloomy report described a shortage of painkillers in Leningrad, the absence of vitamins in Kiev, and a lack of allergy medicines in Yerevan. The reporters phoned more than fifty pharmacies in Moscow and learned that mustard plasters, a quaint remedy for congestion, were available at five of them (but would be sold out in half an hour).

"We now have a shortage of even the most simple medicines in the country," Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov exclaimed in an emotional speech to the Council of Ministers in August. The health minister, Igor Denisov, says that the pharmaceutical industry is collapsing more quickly than the rest of industry; in an interview on the television show "In the USSR Government," Denisov stated that only 30 percent of the demand for medicine will be met next year. According to Murray Feshbach, a U.S. expert on Soviet health care, many Moscow officials believe that by next year there may be no medicines available at all. Out of more than 6,500 types of medicines and medical supplies used in the USSR, 1,200 are not produced domestically and another 1,900 are made in extremely limited quantities. The official trade union newspaper *Trud* (Labor) has suggested the possibility of "aspirin riots."

An acute shortage of hypodermic needles and syringes and the poor quality of vaccines have discouraged many Muscovites from getting regular inoculations against diseases such as diphtheria. Eight people recently died of diphtheria in Moscow, and more than 150 cases have been registered with local health authorities. (In the United States there were only three reported cases in 1989 and only two so far this year.) With the increased awareness of AIDS, many people worry about the widespread practice of reusing even disposable syringes and filing down old needles. Jerome Groopman warned in these pages last year that the lack of syringes and poor sterilization techniques make the Soviet Union "fertile ground for a major AIDS epidemic." (See "Red Scare," TNR, April 17, 1989.) Last year in the Northern Caucasus town of Elista more than fifty children were infected with the AIDS virus through the use of unsterile needles.

A major reason for what Mikhail Gorbachev calls the "total paralysis" of medicine production is the fact that the Soviet state allocates only 5 percent of its budget to health care. Because of deficient funds, the eighty operating pharmaceutical factories are working at only 70 percent of capacity. Many other factories, unable to renovate to meet new environmental standards, have been forced to close, and environmental protests have halted the construction of twenty-three new ones. But even the medicines that do get produced are often not delivered within the country because of the general disintegration of the distribution system. Since last December Aeroflot has refused to ship freight from Moscow unless it is paid for in hard currency, which the medical administration does not have.

As the stocks of supplies in pharmacies have dwindled, medicine has become a prime black market item. Organized bands of health sector employees are raiding the shelves of the factories, pharmacies, and hospitals where they work, selling medicines to speculators, who in turn sell them to desperate citizens. Health care personnel regularly extort gifts from patients in exchange for services and treatments. Last year, according to the USSR Prosecutor's Office, they raked in more than 1.6 million rubles (some $2.6 million at the official exchange rate). At an August briefing the prosecutor general, Aleksandr Sukharev, detailed widespread hoarding of medicines in pharmacies in order to sell them later for forged prescriptions. In Volgograd, according to a May report in the paper *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, disposable syringes were being sold on the black market for ten to fifteen rubles—a high price for an item that is supposed to be available to all under the free, state-financed health care system.

The authorities are desperately attempting to cope with the shortages and the criminal activities they have spawned. In order to "guarantee the Soviet citizen's right to health care" and keep the remaining medicines available, the prosecutor's office is stepping up its oversight of activity in the health sector. In 1988 and 1989 it disciplined almost 33,000 health care personnel and 2,000 medical industry workers for infractions ranging from bribery and extortion to outright theft. Sukharev is also demanding the review of dismissed criminal cases against officials of health care and medical industry institutions.

Gorbachev invoked his new emergency powers on September 27 to order drug factories to reopen within one month, and he instructed the Council of Ministers to provide the factories with the material and financial resources needed to become functional and to meet environmental requirements (though he neglected to suggest where such resources might be obtained). And Minister of Health Denisov has outlined plans to build, in cooperation with foreign firms, four new pharmaceutical plants to produce insulin, antibiotics, hormonal preparations, and heart medication.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health has completed a draft law on a plan for medical insurance, in which businesses would help cover the costs of employee health care. Denisov believes that this would increase resources for the health sector to 50 to 60 billion rubles per year (compared with 27.3 billion allocated for 1990). But this is probably wishful thinking. With few companies even

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realizing profits, from what coffers will they draw the additional funds needed for employee benefits?

No quick fixes are in sight. The USSR has been importing drugs from both Eastern Europe and the West to help cover its shortages. In fact, in the first six months of 1990 medicine imports were up by 50 percent in comparison with the first six months of 1989. But this trend is unlikely to continue, given the huge budget deficit (expected to rise to more than 130 billion rubles in 1991) and the foreign debt, which eats about 12.5 billion convertible rubles just in interest. The prime minister predicts that, thanks to the foreign debt, imports of consumer goods and medicines will be reduced by as much as two-thirds in the next year.

The state of Soviet medicine has long been abysmal. Thirty percent of Soviet hospitals lack sewers, running water, and central heating, and 60 percent lack hot running water. Not surprisingly, the country is plagued by outbreaks of hepatitis and cholera. The current lack of availability of medicines (except to those with enough money to shop the black market) will exacerbate such conditions, and further test the already strained patience of consumers. In the end, it may be the shortage of aspirin and mustard plasters, rather than bread and potatoes, that mobilizes a dispirited populace.

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The way Saddam rewards dissent.

BLOOD BAATH

By David A. Korn

On January 27, 1969, Iraq's seven-month-old Baath regime rallied the population of Baghdad for a grisly spectacle. In the city's main square, before some 150,000 people, fourteen men—pitiful figures clad in pajama-like garments—were brought out to be hanged. Their hands tied behind their backs and nooses fitted tightly around their necks, they were pushed from scaffolds. As their bodies dangled in the air, senior officials of the regime harangued the crowd, which cheered and applauded on cue while the victims' alleged crimes of espionage, treason, and corruption were denounced.

Political killing was to become the hallmark of the Baath regime. Over the next two years it announced the execution of eighty-six people, though it is believed to have killed many more. Most of those executed were prominent figures associated with previous regimes. A number were Jews, thrown in to lend verisimilitude to charges of conspiracy and espionage on behalf of Israel and the United States.

But political murder was not to be confined to the Baath party's rivals or opponents. As a young man named Saddam Hussein al-Takriti began to establish himself as the No. 2 figure and heir apparent under President Hassan al-Bakr, life at the top became dangerous. In 1971 Hardan al-Takriti, a relative and rival of Hussein's, was assassinated in Kuwait, where he had fled to exile. In 1973 Hussein and Hassan al-Bakr took advantage of a bungled coup attempt by the regime's security chief, Nadhim Kzar, to eliminate other potential rivals and establish their unquestioned dominance. The next major intraregime bloodletting came in July 1979, when Hussein eased al-Bakr out and made himself president. A few weeks later, twenty-two senior Iraqi officials, among them five members of the Revolutionary Command Council, the ruling group, were executed after summary trial. More killings of top regime figures followed. Perhaps the most gruesome was that of Dr. Riyadh Ibrahim Hassan, Hussein's health minister. In 1982, with the war with Iran going badly for Iraq, Dr. Hassan was rumored to have said that Hussein should step down. He was promptly arrested. According to various reports, his wife telephoned the Iraqi president to plead that he be allowed to return home and was assured that she would soon see him again. His body, it is said, arrived at her doorstep in a sack, chopped into pieces.

Hussein's police apparatus struck right and left against presumed opponents and dissenters. The press was purged. Universities were swept clean of wrong-thinking teachers, students, and scientists. Thousands were jailed or killed or fled abroad. At the end of the 1970s, Hussein proceeded to smash Iraq's large Communist Party, with which he had found it convenient to ally himself some years earlier. Iraqi Communists were jailed, tortured, and executed. In July 1978 Hussein ordered the execution of some twenty to forty Communists from the ranks of the military. They had been held in jail since 1975, but, as Hussein told *Newsweek*'s Arnaud de Borchgrave at the time, the Soviet ambassador had had the temerity to appeal for clemency for them. Their execution, he told de Borchgrave, would serve as a warning to Moscow not to meddle in Iraq's internal affairs.

Although the secret police agencies hold free writ to murder Iraqi citizens without judicial sanction, the regime has outdone itself in promulgating death penalty legislation to rid itself of unwanted political opposition. Where capital punishment is concerned, Iraq leads the world. Its law stipulates the death penalty for several dozen "offenses": disclosures of state secrets, "economic crimes" (bribery, embezzlement, etc.), leaving the Baath party and joining another, advocating Zionist or Masonic principles, and for insulting the head of state.

Iraqi dissidents who fled abroad were to find that

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exile was no guarantee of safety. In February 1978 Dr. Ayad Allawi, a senior Baath party official until his defection two years earlier, was attacked in bed in his suburban London home in the middle of the night by a man wielding an ax. That July former Iraqi Prime Minister Abdul Razzaq al-Nayef was shot down in London on the steps of the Intercontinental Hotel by assassins identified with the Iraqi Embassy. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s Iraqi dissidents were murdered in Beirut and Cairo, in Western Europe, in places as far away as Pakistan, Thailand, and reportedly even in the United States.

As tensions between Iraq and Iran mounted at the end of the 1970s, Iraqi Shiites came under suspicion for sympathizing with Khomeini's revolution. Even before Iraq invaded Iran in 1980, tens of thousands of Iraqi Shiites and Iranian citizens long resident in Iraq were taken from their homes and jobs, stripped of their property, and forcibly moved across the border into Iran without money, passports, or other identity documents. Iraq continued to deport in this manner Shiites and others whose loyalty was deemed suspect throughout the war. Both the Western media and Western and international relief agencies overlooked the plight of these people, and they were left to subsist miserably in camps set up and meagerly supplied by the Iranian government.

Many Shiite clergymen were arrested, tortured, or killed. Particularly savage acts of repression were directed against the prominent Shiite al-Hakim family, whose members had for generations distinguished themselves in Iraq in theology, law, medicine, and science. Before Iraq went to war with Iran, one family member, Mohammed Baqr al-Hakim, fled to Tehran, where he made radio broadcasts attacking the Baath regime. In May 1983 Iraqi authorities arrested some eighty male members of the al-Hakim family and executed six of them. One of those arrested, Mohammed Hussein al-Hakim, a man in his 70s, was made to witness the executions and then reportedly kept alone in a cell for ten days with his eyes taped shut. After this he was put on a plane for Ankara with instructions to go on to Tehran to warn Mohammed Baqr al-Hakim that if he did not cease his activities against the Iraqi government all the other members of his family would be executed. In Tehran he went mad and died, and in March 1985 the Iraqi government executed his three sons and seven other members of the al-Hakim family. In January 1988 Iraqi agents lured Sayyed Mahdi al-Hakim, another member of the family and a prominent Shiite clergyman, from his exile in London to Khartoum, where they assassinated him.

For those familiar with Iraq's practice of collective punishment, Hussein's detention of Western civilians in Iraq and Kuwait after the United Nations-imposed sanctions came as no surprise. Mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, wives, and children of Iraqis who have fled political arrest frequently have been jailed and sometimes tortured and killed. During the Kurdish uprising in the middle and late 1980s, Iraqi authorities routinely took and executed hostages in reprisal for guerrilla attacks. Amnesty International reports that in September and October 1985 they arrested some 300 Kurdish children and youths. The Iraqi government sought to use them as hostages to persuade their parents or other relatives who had joined the Kurdish guerrilla movements to give themselves up. According to Amnesty, many were tortured and nearly thirty were killed.

All of this violence—the killing, the torture, the disappearances, and the deportations—may have had some intrinsic value for the dark psyche of Iraq's Baath leaders, but essentially it was a means to an end. The objective was to implant Baath rule, which is to say Hussein's rule, so firmly that virtually nothing could shake it. As opposition was rooted out, Iraq's Baath party built itself into a gigantic octopus-like body. From fewer than 20,000 members and followers when it seized power in 1968, the Baath party expanded to a million and a half in a decade, with tentacles reaching all strata of Iraqi society. Members were recruited by intimidation as well as by inducement. Educators were required to become informants, to submit regular reports on colleagues, friends, and even family members. Their own comportment was subject to close scrutiny, and punishment for deviation was more severe for them than for others. Once you were in the Baath party, there was, literally, no way to leave except feet first.

By the late 1980s repression had been so successful that outside the Kurdish areas (where resistance was to be broken first through the use of poison gas and then through massive forced displacement of Kurds) hardly a shred of opposition remained. Those who could not conform or disguise their disagreement with the regime were dead, in prison, or in exile. Those Arab Iraqis and Kurdish collaborators who remained could expect to benefit from Iraq's welfare state—its subsidized housing, health care, and advanced educational opportunities—and from the monetary rewards handed out by the Baath party. The regime based its power mainly on the stick, but it knew how to make ample use of the carrot as well. For it was Hussein's ambition to turn Iraq into a modern, technologically advanced society capable of sustaining a mighty military arm.

During both the Reagan and Bush administrations, State Department officials would acknowledge privately that Iraq was possibly the world's worst offender of human rights. But the United States nonetheless had to support Hussein's regime, they argued, for it was a bulwark against Khomeini's Iran, and it had the world's second-largest known oil reserves after Saudi Arabia. In 1983 the State Department removed Iraq from the list of countries sponsoring terrorism, even though Baghdad continued to harbor Mohammed Abu Abbas, the terrorist who in 1985 masterminded the *Achille Lauro* hijacking.

Is it any wonder that Saddam Hussein came to think he could get away with swallowing up Kuwait? He had found from experience that Iraq's transgressions would

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be ignored by the United States, or if his government was publicly rebuked, some reward would soon follow to compensate for the unpleasantness. In 1984 the Reagan administration publicly protested Iraq's use of poison gas in the war against Iran, but soon after re-established diplomatic relations with Iraq. In September 1988 Secretary of State George Shultz lashed out at Iraq's use of poison gas against the Kurds. But the administration opposed efforts in Congress to legislate sanctions against Iraq, and even a watered-down sanctions bill was quietly buried when the House and Senate adjourned for fall elections. Then once again came a reward: the next year the Bush administration doubled its credit guarantees for Iraq to more than a billion dollars. When Hussein began expelling Iraqi Kurds in massive numbers from their native lands in 1988 and 1989 (some 500,000 by the State Department's estimate), neither the Reagan nor the Bush administration uttered even a mild public reproof. Even after he threatened to burn up half of Israel with poison gas, the administration defended Iraq against renewed congressional efforts to legislate sanctions. The line, right up to the end, was that we could not afford to antagonize Iraq.

Matters of principle aside, it should have been obvious that a ruler who deals ruthlessly with his own people is unlikely to behave differently in the international arena. But Reagan and Bush and their Middle East advisers apparently never considered Iraq's human rights violations to be of more than marginal importance. The president has now acknowledged that the whole policy toward Iraq was a mistake. But nothing the administration has said so far suggests that it has understood why.

DAVID A. KORN is the author of Middle East Watch's report *Human Rights in Iraq* (Yale University Press).

People's capitalism revisited.

EVERY MAN A MILKEN

By Michael Lewis

In the past couple of years the agile rich have performed a neat spiritual U-turn. Amid collapsing asset prices and a shifting zeitgeist, the Bible seems to have replaced *The Art of the Deal* as the class text. Ivan Boesky has claimed he wants to become a rabbi, Michael Milken has escorted poor children to baseball games, and scores of young, unindicted Wall Street dropouts have said that they intend to earn less money and lead more socially redeeming lives. Even Donald Trump in his most recent memoir makes loud noises about the futility of material possessions.

All of which is as human as it is convenient. For almost ten years, however, the lucky winners of the Reagan years sent a quite different message to the less fortunate: success was money and money was made with debt, tax games, paper shuffling, and arrogance. The people listened. And an insidious side effect of the chrome-plated Reagan boom may yet be fully realized: the average American has been left with a whole new notion of how to succeed.

The man who is at once the voice and beneficiary of this new idea is named Charles J. Givens, previously known only for his authorship of the hit song "Hang on Sloopy." For the past few years Givens has been hawking to ordinary Americans a way of life redolent of the financial '80s. His book, *Wealth Without Risk*, has sold more than a million copies and has been stuck at the top of the Advice and How-to Best-seller Lists for the past eighty weeks. He has been advanced $3 million by Simon and Schuster for a sequel. He has started an organization, named for himself, which has a quarter million members and is growing more quickly than ever. And he has been featured in such putatively respectable organs of business as *Success* magazine, a sure sign something is amiss.

Givens first reaches his audience with a series of late-night, fifteen-minute television commercials. A white stretch limousine glides across the screen as Givens restates the generous American belief that it is never too late to remake one's character. "The last four letters of American are I CAN," he says. "Everybody can be a winner . . . you don't need to have big money to make big money . . . all you need to be is serious about wanting to be wealthier. . . . Come to see us and it may change the rest of your life." Givens appears—in a photo with George Bush and clips from virtually every talk show in America—and a second voice enters to establish his credentials as a Success merchant: "Although Charles Givens started out with nothing, today he is accustomed to moving in the centers of power." Then the voice begins to tick off Givens's possessions, as if these, too, were credentials. His "$150,000 Rolls Royce and stretch Lincoln." His "$2 million Florida tree-lined estate." His "staff of six." His "candlelight dinners" eaten from his "$50,000 antique dining room set."

At first this seems like just a more crude and commercialized version of such premodern merchants of success as Dale Carnegie (*How to Win Friends and Influence People*) and Norman Vincent Peale (*The Power of Positive Thinking*). But then we hear how several average Americans have found Success with Charles Givens. A man described as "possibly the richest fireman in America" says, "At the time [before he found Givens] we were paying taxes like everyone else. Then we went into the 0 percent tax bracket." Another man mentions how he reduced the interest rates on his credit cards. Givens himself says that the way to succeed is to "start by making everything you spend money on tax deduct-

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ible." The advertisement attracts people to Givens's free lectures, where new members are enrolled at $499 a head in the Givens Organization.

I traveled to Queens for one of the dozen talks given recently in the New York area. More than 2,000 undersuccessful people filled an auditorium on a rainy week night to hear one of the many Givens spokesmen now touring the country. Right from the start the event had quasi-religious overtones. The speaker was introduced by his proud, sparkling wife, much like a Bible Belt television preacher. His creepy Aryan charm recalled the representatives of "Up With People," who do half-times at the Cotton Bowl. He said so often that he "cared" about us and that he wanted to "share" his success that it was easy to forget you were expected to pay for the privilege. Like Givens, the speaker was a poor boy made good; he had once, he said, held a job that paid him a dollar an hour to count nails. So there was hope for us all. "The difference between YOU and everybody else," he told us with a Baptist twang, "was that you CARED enough to take that first step."

God and money have never been as far apart in America as they are in most places. Partly this must be because selling is a form of ecstasy in America. But there is also a long history of American preachers aiming to reconcile the moral precepts of the Bible with the making of money. (Peale is one example, as was Russell Conwell, the author of the world's most successful success pamphlet, based on a sermon, called *Acres of Diamonds*.) With the clergy dragging God toward the market, it seems only practical for the laity to pick up the market and drag it toward God. Thus the new breed of success merchants laces its language with pulpit-speak and references to Christian values.

"I'd like to SHARE with you," said the speaker, "the strategies that the rich and the wealthy and the elite have been using for years." And with that he moved to the meat of his lecture, which assumed an income of about $20,000 a year. (The crowd seemed comfortable with this assumption.) The speaker started with a reevaluation of the credit card. He revealed that there was a credit card issued by a bank in Arkansas bearing an interest rate of only 11.75 percent. A murmur ran through the crowd. The Givens Organization tracks credit card interest rates around the country, so Givens members can always be using the card with the lowest rate. But that's not the Credit Card Strategy. The Credit Card Strategy is to find a card with no up-front fee and a long grace period. With the card you borrow interest-free money, then deposit that money in an interest-bearing account. "It's called the float," said the speaker, "and it can earn you up to $400 a year. . . . Using other people's money is what the float is all about."

Nobody laughed. Here was a way to make money without working or taking risk! he enthused. Just like they do on Wall Street! he might have added. The credit card with a grace period is a vehicle by which every American can become a banker. It is also deeply anti-social: it only works as long as a small fraction of the issuing bank's clientele practices the strategy. The "float" is money borrowed interest-free from the issuing bank, and a bank that makes loans free of interest can't survive. Like a lot of the high-rolling strategies of the 1980s, this trick exploits to the hilt the gap between what is legal and what is right. In a funny way it is reassuring that the average guy has come to appreciate that there is some trick to Success, that Success as we now know it is less a product of industry than of beating the system. What more could one ask of people whose bank managers gamble with their deposits? On the other hand, the attitude underpinning the Credit Card Strategy is a social problem that, like rising crime and streetpeople, can plausibly be dropped on the doorstep of the Roaring '80s. As if to illustrate my point, the speaker removed his jacket-with-pocket-handkerchief, revealing (I swear) a pair of red suspenders. Clearly the style of the newly rich has trickled down faster than their money.

"The average American makes about $350,000 over a lifetime," continued the speaker. "If we could save some of those dollars, think how much richer we'd be. That's why we need tax strategies." The first strategy was to start a small business. Not actually to *do* anything, mind you. A business, he said, was a tidy package of twenty-seven different legal tax deductions. It enabled you to deduct, for example, the allowance you pay your kids ("Pay 'em to answer the phone, to wash the company car"). It enabled you to take friends out to dinner on Uncle Sam ("So long as you discussed business before, during, or after the meal with this customer who happens also to be a friend or a neighbor . . . after all, they too can be customers"). But best of all, "There's no minimum number of hours you have to spend on this business. You don't have to quit your job." In sum, "Starting a small business can make those dollars you are already spending TAX DEDUCTIBLE."

The second strategy, really just more of the same, was to deduct all your time spent away from your new business. "Your vacations," he said, "are tax deductible." Arrange to be interviewed for a job with Caesar's Palace (wink, wink), and a trip to Las Vegas can be passed off as business. The crowd chuckled with delight. "Oh," he said, growing emotional, "there are just a BUNCH of things like this I wanna share with you." And who could blame the people for listening? Not Henry Kravis, who made his first billion structuring leveraged buyouts, the success of which turned on tax schemes. Not Donald Trump, who explains in *The Art of the Deal* how he made his first big killing by squeezing a forty-year exemption of property taxes out of the city of New York.

Of course, none of these two-bit schemes adds up to real wealth, just a bit more pocket money. What Givens is selling isn't so much success as the illusion of success. But even this is a reflection of the times, when success for the average person has become chiefly an illusion

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created by the not-so-average person. So says the past master himself. "Every blue-collar worker wants to be treated like a high roller, not like an ordinary guy," writes Trump about his troubled casino. "These people gravitate towards the symbols of success; they want to TOUCH success. Knowing this, I wasn't surprised when [a neighboring casino's] blue-collar ad campaign turned out to be a total failure."

In his slightly out-of-date but otherwise excellent study, *The American Idea of Success*, Richard Huber traces the development of three distinctly American paradigms of success. The "character ethic" is the neglected idea that one gets ahead by application and thrift. The "mind-power ethic" is Peale and all those people who listen to tape recordings in their sleep. The "personality ethic" is the graduate of the Dale Carnegie course, who insists on using your name at every turn ("Remember," wrote Carnegie, "that a man's name is to him the sweetest and most important sound in any language.") The last two, creations of modern American capitalism, are easily mocked; yet both have their redeeming sides. The modern idea, which might be called the "financial manipulation ethic," does not. Or if it does, I haven't been able to find it.

Givens, oddly, claims to follow in the tradition of Dale Carnegie. In the success he has enjoyed he may be right. But in the spirit of the success he has been selling he couldn't be further from the truth. This was made plain at the end of the lecture in Queens, when people went out into the foyer to join the Givens Organization. Perhaps 400 of the 2,000 in attendance were inducted. Given the preternaturally loving tone of the lecture, the process was surprisingly contentious. Ten Givens men with blow-dried hair, false smiles, pocket handkerchiefs, and red suspenders stood behind tables and told prospective members that the minute they left the building the price of membership would rise from $499 to $599. The people argued and haggled, prompting a Givens man to sprint back into the lecture hall (where the speaker was answering questions) and grab the speaker's proud wife. "You gotta come help," he said, "things are getting ugly. These folks are rude and IRATE." Where, he might have asked, is Dale Carnegie when you need him?

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The shortcut to medical breakthroughs.

STALKING THE COLD TRAIL

By Timothy Springer

Within the last year we have moved closer to victory in the war on colds. Two collaborating research groups, one of which I head, discovered a way to prevent the cold virus from infecting cells in a test tube. Since the common cold is responsible each year for 30 million lost days at school and work, $3 billion in doctors' office visits, and more than $2 billion in over-the-counter remedies, it is not surprising that this news found a large audience. Headline writers had a field day with puns such as "Nothing to Sneeze At" and "Nosing Ahead in the Cold War." Taking a different tack, Susan Trausch wrote a humorous piece in *The Boston Globe* based on her tribulations with unsuccessful remedies, such as vitamin C, titled, "Don't toss out the tissues, this cold remedy may not be so hot." Her skepticism is healthy; it remains to be seen whether this work will lead, as we hope, to a nose spray that can fend off the cold virus. However, Trausch's column perpetuated a common misconception about how science works, a misconception that warps the government's funding of biomedical research. She wrote: "I know that researchers could—and should—put the petri dishes to better use on AIDS or cancer or Alzheimer's or birth defects or any of the other horribles that have become so common."

Certainly AIDS is a more urgent priority than the common cold. But that isn't to say that AIDS research deserves additional money. Science isn't like many human pursuits, such as the space program and other engineering projects, in which goals are reached through a systematic frontal assault. Work on one problem often yields insights into another, and sometimes takes an entirely new direction as a result. The key to curing anything, including AIDS and the common cold, may come from entirely unexpected sources. Hence the ultimately practical significance of "basic" biomedical

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research—research that seeks the solution not to particular therapeutic problems, but to interesting scientific puzzles. Curing major diseases typically calls for basic discoveries, while "applied," or "clinical," research can at best provide incremental improvements in care.

There is currently a crisis in funding for basic biomedical research. The biotechnology revolution, which began in the United States, continues to spur scientific discovery, as the inner workings of cells and molecules are deciphered in intimate and glorious detail. Superficially disparate inquiries are being unified at a profound level, and seemingly unrelated health problems are being shown to have common origins. Yet the nation's investment in basic biomedical research is not commensurate with its promise. There is less and less money available to support young scientists who are needed to keep the biotechnology revolution blossoming. One minor reason is that so much money has been diverted toward targeted research, such as that on AIDS. A larger reason is that so few in Congress and in the public understand how diseases get conquered.

As it happens, AIDS and the common cold are especially good examples of the cross-fertilization and serendipity that characterize deep scientific research. Though these diseases are quite different in their causes and clinical symptoms, basic studies in cellular and molecular biology reveal underlying parallels. In particular, we have recently moved a step closer to curing or preventing both diseases by using surprisingly similar "decoy molecules." It is conceivable that an eventual cure for AIDS could come from work on the common cold, or vice versa. What's more: the same basic research that led to a decoy molecule for the common cold has a bearing on cancer, inherited birth defects, and Alzheimer's disease. Indeed, this very molecule that my colleagues and I discovered, ICAM-1, is involved in all these maladies. ICAM-1 may even prove effective in preventing kidney transplant rejection, minimizing damage from heart attacks, and reversing rheumatoid arthritis. Understanding how a single discovery could have such broad therapeutic potential is essential in appreciating the confusion that now afflicts the government's approach to biomedical research.

Immunology, the study of how the body defends itself against viruses, bacteria, and parasites, has contributed massively to human health. The most striking achievement is the extinction of smallpox. Smallpox epidemics used to take a fearsome toll, killing one-quarter of those infected and leaving the rest pockmarked but grateful to have lived. Survivors were protected from further attack; they had become immune. In the late 1700s Edward Jenner, a British country physician, noticed that milkmaids never got smallpox. He reasoned that this was because they contracted cowpox from their cows. Although cowpox produces pustules similar to those of smallpox, it is neither fatal nor disfiguring. Jenner transferred pus containing the cowpox virus from a cow to the arm of a young boy, who was thereby protected against a subsequent exposure to smallpox. ("Vaccination" comes from the Latin word for cow, *vacca*.) Two centuries later, in 1979, through a vaccination program coordinated by the World Health Organization, smallpox as a disease was eradicated. The smallpox virus survives only in some test tubes stored in two well-guarded freezers, preserved out of scientific interest in an organism whose evolution has been so tragically and closely entwined with our own. In a strange way, the smallpox virus has been accorded the status of an endangered species.

Vaccination worked because the cowpox and smallpox viruses are so closely related that immunity to one brought immunity to the other. This principle, called cross-reactivity, has been much exploited since Jenner's day. The modern polio vaccine, for example, is made by mutating strains of polio virus until they are so weak that they can survive in the intestine but never invade the nervous system and cause paralysis; they still resemble the original virus closely enough, though, to impart immunity to it. Lessons learned with polio have been applied to the production of vaccines against other viruses, including those for rubella, measles, mumps, and hepatitis. However, vaccines against the viruses that cause the common cold and AIDS remain out of reach. There are several reasons.

Viruses are little packets of genetic material, wrapped in a protein coat, that lack the machinery to reproduce. They gain entry into our cells and subvert our machinery for cellular replication, using it to make copies of themselves. More than 1,000 copies of a virus may be made inside a single cell, after which they can leave to infect other cells.

Many kinds of viruses cause colds, the most common of which are called rhinoviruses. (The Greek root *rhino* signifies their predilection for our noses.) Through evolution, the rhinovirus has developed a cunning numbers game. There are more than 100 types of rhinoviruses, and though their overall structures are based on the same molecular blueprint, there is just enough variation in the shapes of their protein coats so that they do not cross-react; the immune response developed against one rhinovirus invasion—the massing of antibodies and lymphocytes that vanquish the virus—does not confer immunity to the other ninety-nine rhinoviruses. This is why it has been impossible to produce a single vaccine effective against all, or even the majority of, cold viruses. Over the generations, rhinoviruses have learned (if evolution can be thought of as a learning process) the value of diversification.

The rhinovirus does not evade the immune response. In fact, it dares the immune response to hit back and then manipulates the response to its own ends. Mucous secretions, runny noses, and sneezes are loaded with viruses. These symptoms have evolved to help wash infectious organisms out of our bodies, but in the case of colds they are grossly disproportionate to the region of the nose actually infected. The virus seems to have figured out how to shift our responses into overdrive in order to hitch a ride to our friends and family.

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At first glance, it might appear that rhinoviruses and the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which causes AIDS, could not be more different. HIV's strategy—knocking out our whole immune defense system—is much more sinister than that of any other virus. But there are deep similarities nonetheless.

HIV infects a certain class of lymphocytes (the white blood cells that mount counterattacks against viruses and other parasites). There are more than a trillion lymphocytes in the body, and different classes of them have different functions, much as the Army, Air Force, and Navy do different jobs in a war. Half of the lymphocytes come from the thymus gland and are called thymus-derived or T lymphocytes, which can in turn be subdivided into two kinds. One of these is distinguished by the presence of a molecule on the cell surface that is called CD4. Cells with the CD4 molecule, about two-thirds of the T lymphocyte population, are the ones the HIV virus invades and cripples. These cells are essential in all facets of the immune response, including the neutralization of viruses. That is why AIDS patients are prey to so many diseases.

To make matters worse, HIV has evolved a numbers game of its own. In using the cellular machinery to reproduce, the virus is error-prone, so that it mutates at a high rate. This allows the evolution of many types of HIV viruses, which only weakly cross-react. Even within a single infected individual, changes in the structure of HIV can occur several different times, helping the virus escape recognition by antibodies and lymphocytes. The immune system attempts to recognize and respond to these new shapes, and the result is a race between it and the virus. Although this Hegelian dialectic rages in the course of many viral diseases, the AIDS virus differs in the rapidity with which it mutates, and in its eventual crippling of the immune defense system. Although work on an HIV vaccine is intensive and somewhat promising, there is no assurance that it will ever bear fruit.

There are many unifying principles in biology, some broad enough to encompass diseases as trivial as the common cold and as horrendous as AIDS. Consider the way HIV and cold viruses gain entry into our cells. In both cases, a molecule on the surface of the virus binds to a molecule with a complementary shape on the surface of the cell, called a receptor molecule. Modern molecular biology has permitted the engineering of decoy receptors that are identical to real receptors so far as the virus can tell, but are not attached to cells. Essentially, the virus thinks it is walking through the front door of one of our cells, but falls through a trap door instead.

These decoy molecules exploit the virus's Achilles' heel. The one constraint on the mutability of a virus, on its ongoing evasive evolutionary metamorphosis, is that the virus must retain the structural components required for attachment to the cell receptor. Since the decoy receptor molecule and the real receptor molecule are identical in the region that binds the virus, this means that evolution will not permit any mutation that would let the virus escape the lure of the decoy. The virus has no way out. Either it retains recognition of the receptor and thus its fatal attraction to the decoy, or it mutates and commits suicide.

This is what makes the decoy strategy perhaps the most exciting development in the war against viruses since vaccination. Whereas vaccination against rhinovirus is difficult because there are 100 kinds of rhinoviruses, 90 percent bind to a single type of receptor, the ICAM-1 molecule, and thus to a single decoy. Although there are many strains of HIV, all bind to a single receptor. This receptor is in fact the CD4 molecule, which explains why HIV infects only the subpopulation of lymphocytes that bears this molecule. Decoy ICAM-1 and CD4 molecules have been found to block these viruses from infecting cells in the test tube, and a decoy molecule for HIV is being tested in humans. Many tricky improvements will probably be required before either one of these is effective, if they can be made to work at all. Still, the potential is enormous.

If the potential is ever realized, the routes of administration of the decoys will differ: by injection for AIDS and by nose drops for the cold. But the underlying principle is the same. It is noteworthy that decoy molecules emerged largely from research having nothing to do with AIDS or the common cold, but in basic research on how cells work. Human cells have not evolved receptor molecules to help viruses get on board. Receptor molecules do an important job for our cells, serving as portals for communication with the rest of the body. For example, hormones attach themselves to receptors, and thereby send messages to the heart of the cell; that is how the hormone adrenaline persuades liver cells to reach into long-term energy storage and retrieve sugar, which is then burned for quick energy. Viruses have subverted receptors for their own insidious purposes, much as Norway rats use mooring lines to gain entry to ships.

ICAM-1 (intercellular adhesion molecule one) was discovered in the course of trying to understand how cells stick to one another. Its structure had been completely described before anyone realized that the rhinovirus receptor, which had been isolated in an independent line of research, had the same structure. (This discovery was made both by a group at Molecular Therapeutics in New Haven and by my research group in collaboration with a group at Boehringer-Ingelheim in Danbury, Connecticut.) Similarly, the CD4 molecule emerged in basic research on lymphocytes before anyone realized that it was the receptor for the HIV virus. In both cases, a thorough description of the molecules—complete with the DNA sequences that produce them—emerged without the benefit of funding targeted specifically at the illnesses they abet.

Understanding the normal function of ICAM-1 and related adhesion molecules has led to the design of new antibodies and genetically engineered drugs, now being tested, to prevent the rejection of transplanted organs. The rejection response seems to depend on an

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increase in the number of ICAM-1 receptors along cell surfaces. The lymphocytes then use these receptors as landing pads in their assault on the "invading" transplanted organ. A similar massing of lymphocytes along ICAM-1 receptors accounts for the inflammation in arthritis. In both cases, diverting the lymphocytes with decoys seems a promising line of therapy. Intriguing, if more tentative, insights into cancer and other diseases have also resulted from the study of receptor molecules. And work on ICAM-1 has led to the discovery of an inherited birth defect called leukocyte adhesion deficiency, which, as a result, is now near treatment.

The moral of the story should be clear: we are studying the inner workings of life at such deep levels that important findings in basic research are bound to have repercussions in many fields. Unfortunately, research funding often fails to take cognizance of this fact.

For example, the National Institutes of Health, the nation's largest source of funding for biomedical science, is oriented toward specific applications. There are institutes for particular organs, such as the National Eye Institute and the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, and for particular diseases, such as the National Cancer Institute. Some of this can be justified, especially as a way to organize applied, or clinical, research. And certainly substantial basic research takes place within many of these institutes as well. But the effect is to give special interest groups—representing, say, arthritis victims—a sense of entitlement to applied research funds; meanwhile, basic research slips between the cracks as Congress creates more and more, narrower and narrower, institutes. The National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Disease, and the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, formerly combined in one institute, are mainly focused on research with specific applications. Yet by far the most important advances, for example in diabetes research, are coming from basic immunology research, which is not funded by these institutes.

The largest single source of NIH funding for basic research is what is called the investigator-initiated grant. Individual researchers at universities, medical schools, or research institutes come up with their own research proposals and submit them to NIH for review by national panels of experts. Investigator-initiated grants have helped give the United States the greatest biomedical research base in the world, and they remain a key both to our continued leadership in biotechnology (which is being eroded by Japan and Europe) and to continued improvements in health care around the world. (They played a key role in the discovery of both ICAM-1 and CD4.)

Sadly, these grants are less and less accessible. Today only 18 percent of approved investigator-initiated applications are funded, whereas a few years ago the figure was more than twice that. Young assistant professors at medical schools are at one of the most creative and productive stages of their careers, typically with five to seven years of doctoral training and two to five years of postdoctoral training under their belts. Yet only one in nine proposals submitted by new assistant professors gets funded. Increasingly, people at earlier stages in their careers are wondering whether the long and arduous training is worth it.

The causes of the funding crunch are several. First, research has gotten more expensive as research techniques have grown more sophisticated. It costs more to keep a good young researcher productively engaged today than it did fifteen years ago. Second, there was a decision several years ago to lengthen grants from an average of 3.3 years to 4.3 years. Though this is a defensible policy, designed to cut the amount of time researchers spend doing paperwork, it has created a sharp reduction in the number of grants available each year. Third, there is the narrow targeting of funds for research programs such as the Human Genome Initiative, AIDS, and many other diseases. Strictly speaking, money for these programs isn't taken from other parts of the NIH budget. But it seems likely that the relatively large sums they're consuming have helped deafen Congress to pleas for help from elsewhere within NIH.

Since 1987 the number of annual investigator-initiated grants, the type that fund laboratory research scientists, has dropped from 6,453 to 4,633. Earlier this year a House appropriations subcommittee, after hearing a recent Nobel Prize winner testify that he feared his NIH funding might not be renewed, strongly supported raising the administration's 1991 request of 5,095 new grants to 6,000. In July the House approved the plan. But whether the Senate will follow suit amid present budgetary pressures is unclear.

AIDS is the most terrible and potentially destructive health menace today, and certainly more money could be usefully spent fighting it. But it is not clear that targeting more funds specifically for AIDS, or for any other disease, is the best approach. Not only the CD4 decoy molecule, but also the drug AZT, which mitigates some AIDS symptoms, came out of basic research in other fields; nobody could have predicted their use against HIV. In fact, AZT was synthesized in 1964 and CD4 was discovered in 1979—before AIDS was recognized as a disease. Much of this early work was funded by NIH, but in the war against cancer rather than the war against AIDS. Such are the strange twists of fate that characterize basic research. There are signs that this message is beginning to sink in. Even AIDS activist groups such as ACT UP have recently come around to the idea that we need more basic research.

If we are really serious about curing diseases such as AIDS, any increase in targeted spending must be accompanied by an equal increase in funding for basic research, with no restrictions except that it go to investigators with the most original ideas who are working on problems of the widest importance. The predictability of unpredictability is one of the few certainties of basic biomedical research. •

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THE ABYSS

By Robert Kuttner

> The harvest is past, the summer is ended.
> And we are not saved.
>
> —Jeremiah 8:20

You have heard some of this before. The difference this time is that it is finally coming to pass.

The crisis of the moment is the budget impasse; but that is a mere spike on the seismograph. The earthquake is yet to come. Throughout the 1980s dozens of critics, liberal and conservative, warned that the U.S. economy was living on borrowed time, pursuing disastrous policies, squandering its strength, postponing and worsening a day of reckoning. The Calvinist version of the prophecy (Peter G. Peterson, Benjamin Friedman) stressed macroeconomics: excess consumption, low savings, high debt. The Structuralist critics (Lester Thurow, Robert B. Reich, Clyde Prestowitz, James Fallows, George Lodge, Kevin Phillips) emphasized a broad, complex loss of competitiveness and slow-fused, ineluctable decline, perhaps ending with America as economic ward of the Japanese. Still others, such as the British economist Stephen Marris, warned ominously of a financial "hard landing" triggered by a collapse of the U.S. dollar. A favorite metaphor was that of the frog on the stove: scorch its behind and it jumps out of the pot; turn up the heat slowly and it poaches to death.

But throughout the 1980s all of these critics could have been dismissed as Chicken Littles or "Declinists"—for Doomsday never came. Indeed, the stock market recovered from the twin October crashes of 1987 and 1989, tickling a new high of 2999.75—and this occurred *after* the scale of the savings and loan disaster became known, and *after* it was clear that federal deficits in excess of $200 billion would continue indefinitely. Postwar America—despite homelessness, AIDS, and urban blight; despite the decline of export markets, the dollar, the middle class, General Motors, and the New York Yankees; despite MTV and Donald Trump—was, it seemed, still living in its special state of grace. Supply-siders took the credit: After all, wasn't it their policy of rewarding enterprise, of freeing America from statist torpor and Carterite malaise, that created 20 million new jobs and touched off a record peacetime expansion?

Now such boasts seem suddenly hollow, and economic doomsday seems distressingly near. Depending on your definition, we are either in recession or on the brink of one. But whenever the recession officially arrives, it will be far more difficult to get out of—for mutually reinforcing political and economic reasons—than any since the 1930s. Here are the elements of the economic abyss:

Capital punishment. In the 1980s the U.S. economy seemingly defied the laws of economics for two simple reasons: foreign borrowing on unsustainably favorable terms, and a steady decline in the price of oil. Both of these factors have now reversed and are unlikely to return.

Ordinarily, a nation practicing the ultra-Keynesian expansionary policy of the Reagan deficits would quickly face a run on its currency, the way France did in 1982. But dollars are, in effect, the world's currency. That means the United States, uniquely, can incur foreign debt in its own coin, and then devalue that debt at its pleasure. Our allies in Germany and Japan covered America's borrowing binge as long as their capital surplus held out. They kept lending, partly to enable us to keep buying their products, and partly because they liked playing the global role of economic giant and political dwarf. As their real economies strengthened, ours weakened. Throughout the middle and late 1980s foreigners bought an annual average of $70 billion to $80 billion worth of U.S. long-term debt. This powered the U.S. consumer economy, despite record deficits and scant domestic savings, and allowed the Federal Reserve to keep interest rates relatively low. The debt machine was lubricated with ever-cheaper oil, which fell from $34 a barrel in 1981 to $16 last June.

Today these factors are suddenly inoperative. As the banker of Eastern European recovery, Germany has other calls on its capital. And Japan, the low-interest money pump of the 1980s, is now drying out as it attempts to contain its own financial implosion.

Japanese go home. To understand what is in store for the United States, it helps to appreciate the financial turmoil of our lend-lords in Japan. After years of speculative excess fueled by cheap money, the Tokyo stock market has lost nearly half its value—$2 trillion of paper wealth, wiped out. Real estate prices are be-

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ginning to fall. To control the damage, Japanese central bankers have raised prime interest rates six times in the past eighteen months, to a modern peak—which brings Japanese capital exports home. Japan, in effect, is calling its loans.

The financial part of the Japanese miracle was built on a system of cheap credit and delicately choreographed high leverage. Japan's debt ratios could be far higher than ours, because the whole system was cartelized, and administered by the Ministry of Finance. Artificially high real estate values and artificially high prices of consumer goods stimulated high real savings rates. The high property values propped up high stock values; the soaring stocks bid up property values even higher. Corporations and banks, which held each other's stocks as well as vast land holdings, enjoyed artificially strong balance sheets and could pump out loans. With all of this capital sloshing around, real interest rates could stay extremely low. That helped finance Japan's own industrial expansion, as well as its purchase of foreign assets and its investment in America's public debt.

This system contradicted Adam Smith, but it worked. However, as Japan has become more open and somewhat less cartelized (under American pressure—a delicious irony), the balancing act has become ever harder to control. This is further complicated by Japanese bureaucratic politics. In the late 1980s the Bank of Japan was headed by Satoshi Sumita, a Finance Ministry man and an internationalist with close ties to then Treasury Secretary James Baker and Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker. Sumita, to please (and tether) the Americans, kept Japanese interest rates very low, and encouraged Japanese to keep buying American Treasury debt. But just about the time the Japanese economy became dangerously overleveraged, in mid-1989, the office reverted to a Bank of Japan man, Yasushi Mieno, with a typical central banker's concern about inflation. The Bank of Japan is now pursuing an ultratight money strategy, in the manner of Paul Volcker circa 1980, to stage-manage a gradual disinflation and prevent an abrupt collapse.

The significance of all this for the United States is that domestic interest rates in Japan are now astronomical by historic standards—roughly equal to ours—and there is thus no economic reason for Japanese capital to pour into America, where the value of the dollar is falling. The situation is the inverse of the early 1980s, when the United States was the home of high interest rates and a strong currency. Today a Japanese investing in dollar debt gains little on the interest rate spread and risks losing far more on the gradual exchange rate loss.

Roll out the barrel. The Persian Gulf crisis could not have come at a worse moment. The role of oil is hardly worth belaboring. The post-1973 decade of stagflation was triggered by higher priced oil. But the economy was far stronger in 1973 than it is today. The doubling of oil prices since July causes reverberating inflation throughout the economy, and serves as an instant tax on purchasing power of about $100 billion a year. A quick resolution of the Persian Gulf crisis would bring down oil prices somewhat, but most experts think oil eventually will settle down at about $24 a barrel, not at the $16-$18 per barrel prevailing before July. That means a price hike of one-third in the cost of our advanced economy's most basic input. If the Gulf crisis is prolonged, or if a war interrupts supply and refining capacity, the combined inflationary/depressive effect will be even worse.

Policy paralysis. In ordinary times the government has two main tools to coax the economy out of recession: deficits and cheap money. In an era of permanent budget crisis, with deficits already too high, the fiscal weapon is not available. Nor, thanks to the dependence on foreign capital noted above, is the monetary weapon. The dollar has been falling steadily against the yen, and is at a historic low against the mark. To restrain further outflow of foreign capital, and to contain inflationary pressures generated by oil prices, the Fed needs to tighten money policy. But to head off recession, the Fed needs to loosen it. If the Fed does ease short-term interest rates, signaling a cheaper dollar and higher inflation, financial markets will simply anticipate higher prices and demand a higher yield on long-term bonds. The Fed, therefore, has only limited power to affect interest rates.

Budget impasse will make all of this worse in the short run. But a budget agreement like the one just rejected by the House would only be a palliative, and one with possibly toxic effects. The deficit-reduction exercise, which has consumed so much political energy and so much ink, is ephemeral. The more fundamental economic problems are structural, and the markets know it. A budget agreement will give money markets a bit of reassurance and allow the Fed a token easing of monetary policy. But despite the magnitude of the deficit reduction—$500 billion over five years—a budget deal fails to change the fundamental picture. Even using an absurdly sunny set of assumptions, and even after a budget deal so politically painful that it could not pass Congress, deficits in excess of $200 billion stretch as far as the eye can see.

Further, the timing and the distribution of this particular budget deal actually could worsen the slump. The Bush administration waitéd too long. It finally deigned to accept a contractionary fiscal package—just in time to meet, and probably deepen, the oncoming recession. The distributive aspect of the budget deal, besides extracting sacrifice from the wrong people, is bad economics: a tax hike and spending cut that targets the middle class undercuts mass consumer spending more sharply than a tax hike on the rich.

Crunch. All of this comes at a moment when the recovery of the 1980s was already, as economists delicately put it, "mature." Every major indicator demonstrates economic softness. For a decade middle-class consumers had flat wages but sustained their purchasing power with Visa cards, home equity loans, and working spouses. The middle class today is

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tapped out. Consumer borrowing as a fraction of income is now at a postwar peak. But this is not sufficient to sustain consumer spending. Auto sales are down; retail sales are down; take-home pay is down, thanks to flat wages and escalating health insurance costs. Shopping center construction is down 24 percent. Nationally 17.4 percent of downtown office space is vacant; the figure goes over 30 percent in the Sunbelt, and is climbing rapidly in the Northeast. Home sales in August 1990 were down 26 percent from a year ago. Bankruptcies are up 13 percent. Capital spending is flat. Unemployment has now risen for three straight months, to 5.7 percent, and even a moderate recession could quickly kick it up to 8 percent, leading to the usual downward cascade of reduced buying, reduced sales, and additional layoffs.

Corporate debt is also at record levels. According to a study by the Harvard economist Benjamin Friedman, the debt of non-farm businesses in the United States rose from 45 percent of GNP in 1981 to 61 percent of GNP in 1989. Much of this is the legacy of the hostile takeover boom, now defunct, which essentially replaced equity capital with debt. Business debt service now exceeds 26 percent of business cash flow—twice the level of the '60s and '70s. In a recession you can skip a dividend, but you can't skip an interest payment. The greater indebtedness makes corporations that much more vulnerable to a downturn.

Unreal Estate. Recessions come and go, but what is uniquely alarming is that this one comes at a moment when both the real estate sector and the financial sector are far shakier than usual. During the entire postwar period, the normal pattern was for banks to strengthen their earnings and reserves during economic recoveries, leaving them with solid balance sheets to withstand the normal loan losses of recessions. But this recession comes after a decade of steady weakening of the entire financial sector—savings and loans, banks, brokerages, even insurance companies.

The relationship between real estate and banking and the risk of deflationary crash is at the heart of our story. The first highly visible sign of financial collapse was, of course, the savings and loan disaster. But the big commercial banks, even more central to the economy, are in nearly as much trouble as the S&Ls. As Kenneth McLean, the longtime staff director of the Senate Banking Committee and now a banking consultant, observes, the commercial banking business has been gradually squeezed from all sides for more than a decade. In the 1970s money market mutual funds gave households a higher-yield place to put their savings. Large corporations—the traditional bread-and-butter customers of money-center banks—began borrowing money directly from the public in the "commercial paper" market, bypassing banks. (Today the prime bank rate is 10 percent; commercial paper fetches 8 percent.) Many categories of bank lending became "securitized"—underwritten by brokers and sold directly to final investors; mortgage brokers with direct links to pension funds and insurance companies cut into banks' home mortgage business. New competitors like Sears began eating into their credit card market. Branches of foreign banks gradually claimed nearly 30 percent of the U.S. market.

To make up for these lost profit opportunities, the banks moved into higher risk, higher yield activities, especially junk bond deals, Third World loans, and real estate. At the peak of Third World loan losses, in 1983, the exposure of money-center banks to uncollectible Third World loans equaled more than double their capital. They escaped insolvency only because regulators let them carry loans at book value rather than market value, and because the International Monetary Fund helped administer a Ponzi game, lending new money to allow poor countries to pay interest on old debt. During the '80s nearly half of the Third World debt to U.S. banks was sold at a loss, or written off, leaving banks with severely weakened balance sheets.

Banks did not take a bath on the junk bond collapse, but they did lose the big fees they had been earning from providing bridge loans and high-yield syndications, now largely defunct. However, one other major financial industry usually out of the doomsday headlines did invest heavily in junk paper: the $1.3 trillion insurance industry. *Barron's Weekly* recently reported that the junk bond holdings of nine of the largest insurance companies now exceed their total surplus reserves, and that twenty to thirty-four of the 100 largest insurers could become insolvent in a severe recession.

By the late 1980s the banks were left with one proven winner: real estate. But real estate is always vulnerable to cycles of boom followed by overbuilding and crash. There have been regional real estate busts in recent years—New York in the mid-1970s, Texas in the mid-1980s—but the last general real estate collapse was in the Great Depression. The next could be very soon. In the 1980s bankers financed office buildings, condos, shopping malls, and hotels as if the market could only go up. Real estate lending is, by its nature, very highly leveraged. The investor puts up very little of his own money. It is like playing the stock market on wafer-thin margin. Everybody makes out fine as long as property values keep soaring. But when the leverage effect goes into reverse, the developer can be wiped out, and his banker along with him. Alarmingly, the nation's biggest banks are up to their ears in real estate. Chemical and Chase both have more than 35 percent of their domestic loans in real estate. Citicorp has 47 percent—and the real estate collapse has by no means bottomed out. Vacancy rates on office buildings, hotels, shopping malls, and condos continue to soar, and will rise further in a recession.

In a famous article written in 1933, "The Debt Deflation Theory of Great Depressions," the economist Irving Fisher argued that depressions begin after a

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period of high indebtedness collapses into an unwinding of asset values and contraction of credit, triggering a general deflation and a mass shock to purchasing power. Anybody who has gone into hock to buy a house in the past two years and now has to sell it at a loss can instantly grasp Fisher's point. When debts exceed the market value of assets, there is no easy monetary solution. Central bankers can flood markets with cheap credit all they want, but if there are no buyers or borrowers in sight this is like pushing on a string. The Fed has learned a few things since the Great Depression, but a broad deflation of property values will still have dire effects on capital, credit, and purchasing power.

If all of their assets (loans) were written down to their current market value, several of the biggest money-center banks would be insolvent. That is, their losses would exceed their capital. In the past year the percentage of bad loans held by big banks has risen to a postwar record. According to the American Bankers' Association, loan losses in the 1982 recession about doubled, but they doubled from a very healthy low base of just 3 percent of bank capital. In 1989 loan charge-offs equaled more than 11 percent of bank capital. In the first half of 1990, when the economy was still officially in a boom, this rose to more than 14 percent. If a recession again produces a doubling of loan losses, the result will be widespread bank insolvency.

The stock market smells this underlying weakness; bank stock values are so depressed that it is all but impossible for major banks to raise additional capital by selling new issues of stock. Moreover, in the new, post-Keating regulatory environment, the twin roles of federal bank regulators—lender of last resort and policeman—are colliding. The Federal Reserve system exists to provide the system with liquidity, to keep a banking panic from cascading into a credit crunch and a general depression. But a belated and somewhat capricious vigilance on the part of federal bank examiners is, ironically, now contributing to this very effect. In the midst of a capital crunch, a sudden toughening of bank examination standards is the equivalent of shooting the wounded. A big, shaky bank—for example, the Bank of New England—takes a huge hit on speculative real estate lending; it is then slammed again by nervous bank regulators. BNE was made to sell off assets to raise capital, shrinking from a $30 billion bank to a $20 billion one almost overnight. This creates a spillover effect: borrowers are turned away, and other banks, newly wary of regulators getting on their case, hesitate to make loans that would be acceptable in normal times.

Thus the grim chain of causality: a bank gets overextended in real estate; the real estate market goes soft; the bank's loan portfolio takes heavy losses, shrinking its own capital base; the bank's ratio of capital to assets is now too small, the bank can't raise new capital, and loans must be called. Apply this to the entire economy, and you have a massive contraction. Note that all of this damage to the banking sector has occurred *before* the onset of recession.

Until lately the Japanese propped up the entire system in several reinforcing respects. They were the effective banker of last resort. Japanese capital gave U.S. financial players a deep-pockets partner and a place to syndicate deals. Japanese acquisition frenzy helped to buy up (and bid up) American real estate. But just as Japanese capital is now exiting the market for U.S. public debt, it is also exiting the U.S. real estate market. As the value of real estate collapses, the value of loan portfolios is further depressed. This sounds uncannily like Fisher's scenario of a general unwinding and a mass deflation.

In a mass deflation people are laid off all across the economy. New England, already in recession, provides a graphic preview. Banks, insurance companies, and high-tech firms—plus their various vendors, from lawyers and accountants to janitorial services—are all laying off employees. For one thing, orders are slack; for another, as profits fall business desperately tries to stay afloat by pruning costs—which is to say, payroll. Because of the dreadful rendezvous of private recession with delayed federal budget discipline, the public sector is laying off employees too. The public sector is also reducing its subsidy to key labor-intensive industries like health care. Ordinarily in a recession the government plays an expanded role to take up the slack; this time, as in 1929-30, it is contributing to the downturn. Also, the government's economic stabilizers are now weaker than before Reagan; unemployment compensation now covers just one unemployed worker in four. In a steep slump, people locked into expensive mortgages can't afford to sell their homes, and others, with depressed purchasing power, can't afford to buy them.

In a global economy exports should provide a safety valve. And in some specialized industries, exports have come to the rescue. However, the economy has lost nearly a half million industrial jobs in just six months, which suggests there is no prospect of an export-led boom. We are now a net importer of products where America is thought to be a champion, such as automated office equipment and telecommunications. Though manufacturing productivity improved during the 1980s, the cheaper dollar has not had the overall effect on manufacturing exports that economists anticipated. And the American industrial system, with its dependence on short-term profits to supply capital spending, is far more vulnerable to recession than its competitors. In the 1982 recession, German and Japanese industry kept right on investing, while U.S. firms cut back. This recession will disproportionately weaken our industrial competitiveness.

Depending on events in the Middle East and on the reaction of financial markets to fiscal paralysis, the recession could be abrupt or gradual, serious or cataclysmic. It could be triggered by a budget sequester,

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or a stock market collapse, or a crash of the dollar—or it could simply be a steady worsening of present trends. But it is hard to believe that it won't be full-blown by early 1991, and that it won't be at least as severe as those of 1982 or 1975, and quite possibly worse.

Is this picture too bleak? Well, it is just possible that all the imponderable factors will break right. The Persian Gulf crisis will end very fast, and the price of oil will tumble. Real estate values will stabilize and rescue the banks. The Japanese will complete their own administered deflation, and begin pumping in cheap credit again. Congress and the president will strike a budget deal just depressive enough to damp down price inflation and allow the Fed room to ease up, but without deepening the recession.

It is also possible that scientists will invent a machine that turns water into oil. But barring an almost equally improbable series of lucky breaks, policymakers in this recession will be left with a series of bad alternatives. They can sound the alarm bells and beg the Japanese for more cheap credit, but this will only increase Washington's dependence on Tokyo and make it all the more difficult to bargain for either more burden sharing or more Japanese product imports. Or the Federal Reserve could conclude that depression is worse than inflation, and print money. Higher inflation might send capital scurrying back into real estate, which would seemingly rescue the banks; and a dirt-cheap dollar might boost American exports some. But high inflation would also clobber the stock and bond markets, and reduce the value of the banks' financial assets. Or, finally, Congress could go the other way and choose an even more stringently deflationary budget package. That would reassure Wall Street somewhat—but at the price of deepening the recession. Winter is coming, the larder is empty, and the supply of firewood has already been burned.

Of course, there are entirely different ways to dig out of recession, but they are beyond what, for the present, is politically imaginable. For example, a World War II-type solution (but without the bloodshed) would combine steeply progressive surtaxes on high incomes, wage and price restraint, and forced savings—all to pay for a significant increase in public investment. Dr. Win-the-War is who finally cured the last great depression. The war was a massive public works program, which also created technologies that powered the economy for a generation.

As many economists have pointed out, America not only suffers from a trade deficit and a budget deficit; it also suffers from a third deficit, of public and social investment. Public investment in the 1980s was running at about half its historic rate, and there is a body of respectable economic literature that finds public investment highly correlated with private sector productivity growth. To stimulate the economy without triggering inflation, we could begin with a massive program of social investment—roads, bridges, schools, mass transit, parks, environmental cleanup and energy retrofitting, civilian R&D—in other words, everything that went to ruin during the Reagan years. The advantage of this brand of supply-side stimulus is that 100 cents on the dollar is invested, and almost all of it inside the United States, whereas the tax-break kind of incentive often goes for luxury private consumption.

In principle, Congress could slap a major surtax on incomes over $100,000 right now; it could begin a program of public and social investment before unemployment hits 10 percent. But great ideological reverses seldom occur on the brink of crisis. They happen only after we are in the abyss. It took fully twelve years and the shock of world war before the economy finally blasted out of the Great Depression on a wave of massive public spending. The nation was left with a public debt equal to 119 percent of GNP—nearly triple its present fraction—yet with the economy finally back on a high growth path, the debt was worked off, and the private sector flourished.

Unfortunately, the political prognosis is just as grim as the economic one. That is not surprising, for the two blockages are related. The supply-side fraud not only put the budget into chronic deficit; it put the Democrats into a deep ideological coma, in which the option of higher taxes on the rich and greater social investment was expunged from the realm of the politically thinkable. In the Beltway debate about fiscal discipline, there is no serious opposition program on the table, only testy bickering about a little less cutting over here versus adding a few more sin taxes over there. Despite the dim memory of bolder days, the near future does not suggest another Roosevelt; with the political center in paralysis, it could just as easily portend more of David Duke.

In a deepening recession, we remain stuck with a policy agenda—responsible deficit reduction for its own sake—that has been overtaken by events, and with a president still wedded to supply-side cant. The next presidential election is two years off, and there are limits to what even emboldened Democrats could legislate in the meantime. At a minimum, they should use this interregnum to expand the boundaries of the thinkable. As the economy sinks into the pit, support might come from unlikely places. A decade ago, when the laissez-faire gang was riding high on the supply side, bankers, brokers, and industrialists were cheering them on. Today the mixed economy and the financial safety net look damned good to Wall Street. Public investment looks very good to many industrialists on Main Street. There is the beginning once again of a potent anti-laissez-faire coalition, though it is just beginning to cohere. As a senior economist of a money-center bank observed—on deep background: "In the Great Depression, some of America's richest and most influential people came to the conclusion that there are worse things than paying taxes." •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Body Count

This fall we're getting a spate of mobster films. *GoodFellas* led the parade; here are three more. Ahead of us are *The Godfather 3* and, doubtless, others. Why this concentration? Possibly—which is sometimes the case with trends despite all the heavy analysis of them—simple coincidence. Besides, a season rarely goes by without at least one or two gangster films. But there's something of a flood this fall. Curious.

Perhaps one reason for the flood is just that there hasn't been such a flood lately and human nature abhors entertainment vacuums. Perhaps it's because glasnost has crippled the spy-picture industry and has also deprived us of a focus of hate. For four decades, we had an evil empire to organize our system of likes and dislikes. 'Tis gone. (Lord, even Syria isn't an evil empire at the moment.) We need some organizing principle, and the grim situation in the Gulf is both too recent and too tremorous for easy categories of friend and foe.

So why not a return to gangs, Mafia or otherwise? Mobster pictures have an added advantage, as the earlier *Godfather* pictures and as *GoodFellas* prove: they not only align good and evil, they also allow you to *belong* to the evil empire for a couple of hours. This is the higher escapism, much more reality-conscious than such old stuff as two hours in the South Seas with Dorothy Lamour.

One fact is confirmed by this gangster spate: we now live, lexically speaking, in a two-tiered society. I'm not talking about longshoremen and their lexical kin but people like the readers of this journal. Few of us express ourselves in constantly profane language. But when we go to films, gangster or otherwise, we are quite prepared for the dialogue to be thoroughly salted; no one is any longer in the least surprised by it. The ratings people need to measure the profanity, but reviewers never even mention it anymore. Are both public and reviewers afraid of seeming prissy and old-fashioned? In any case, it's as if we switched on a different set of receptors when we enter film theaters, suddenly easy in a different verbal world.

I'm not arguing for censorship. I'm not arguing for anything, merely observing. Certainly, in the interest of verity, mobsters ought to speak the way we know, or think, that mobsters speak. But some films seem to revel in the fact that dialogue restrictions are down. And it seems to me noteworthy that people who would consider mobster vocabulary debasing or disgusting in their own discourse hardly even notice it anymore in films.

About the violence in these films (also rarely noted in reviews), there is only left to say that Hollywood people in the business of manufacturing bullet explosions and blood spurts have a good thing going. The spattering now makes the explicit sex scenes, superfluous though they usually are, a relief.

The Coen brothers enter something of an argument against all the above. Their latest film, **Miller's Crossing** (20th Century Fox), is a gang war film with very little profanity in it, and in the sex scenes, the woman is wearing a bra. But rough language and bare breasts wouldn't have improved it. This is a lifeless, tedious picture. (The recent New York Film Festival saw fit to choose it for the opening night.)

The Coens—Joel directs, Ethan produces, both write their scripts—were overrated from the moment their first film appeared. *Blood Simple* (1984) was a crushingly unclever murder story laden with spurious style. Their next, *Raising Arizona* (1987), was a grotesque, laborious farce. *Miller's Crossing*, about a 1929 gang war, is a complete dud.

The title, never explained, is presumably the name of a place in the woods where dirty deeds are done. The gang war is between an Irish and an Italian gang (plenty of historical precedent) in an unnamed town. Albert Finney is the head of the Irish gang and is shockingly pallid. Jon Polito, who suffers from bouncing eyebrows, is the head of the Italians. Finney's lieutenant, and, alas, the leading man, is Gabriel Byrne, whose speech is as cloudy as his talent and who is personally even less distinctive than Ray Liotta in *GoodFellas*. John Turturro is a Jewish double-dealer, and Marcia Gay Harden is his sister, whose bedmates

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Dreams. *Eight episodes, all of them dreams that Akira Kurosawa has had. All of them have connections with his previous work, but only four of them are the master at his best. (Reviewed 10/8/90)* **The Icicle Thief.** *An Italian delight. Maurizio Nichetti, author-director-actor, bounces present-day color and 1950s black-and-white off each other, saying something about current comfiness and past rigors. (10/1/90)* **Life and Nothing But.** *Bertrand Tavernier, a superb director, once more writes a screenplay that doesn't quite succeed. Still, with the splendid Philippe Noiret in charge, this drama about the identification of missing World War I soldiers in 1920 has breadth and bite. (10/15/90)* **Postcards from the Edge.** *Mike Nichols, as always with a lightweight script, directs dazzlingly. Meryl Streep, as a Hollywood actress, and Shirley MacLaine, as her performer mother, shine in a comedy that needs all the light they give it. (10/8/90)* **—SK**

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are, among others, Finney and Byrne.

The plot would like to be Machiavellian but is only knotted. It's mostly concerned with Byrne's fluctuating loyalties between the two gangs. There are at least four ways the picture tries our patience. (1) The cinematography by Barry Sonnenfeld is draggingly arty (all that vast unused space in interiors). (2) Polito prattles about ethics and respect, like countless Mafia chiefs before him. (3) Bullets once again are highly selective. (Finney stands in the middle of a street firing a submachine gun at a fleeing car, in which someone is firing a similar gun at him. The car explodes; Finney is untouched.) (4) The hero is infrangible. (Byrne goes through beatings and near-stranglings that would destroy a battalion, yet comes out hale.)

The Coens, pretentious though they are, can't compare with Phil Joanou, who made **State of Grace** (Orion). This is about another Irish-Italian gang war—set in Manhattan today, in Hell's Kitchen, which is being gentrified. Again we have a good-bad leading man, this time Sean Penn. Again we have a Mafia capo who talks about ethics. Again we have John Turturro—Italian this time out. The Irish chief is Ed Harris, who doesn't have the power for the part. His brother, played by Gary Oldman, supplies the manic element (Joe Pesci in *GoodFellas*) that is taken to be requisite in these pictures.

Oldman showed genuine talent in *Sid and Nancy* and *Prick Up Your Ears*, but this part calls only for the kind of hysterical exhibitionism—mere cutting loose—that makes other actors groan with envy. How every one of them wishes he could have the part: to anyone of any ability, it's so easy. And it's so sure to be overpraised. There's a woman, of course, sister to Harris and Oldman, played by Robin Wright. Wright tries hard to convey the special sensitivity asked for, but the role is so stupidly conceived, so unbelievable (here's a woman who answers her doorbell wrapped in a bath towel), that there's no reason for Penn to confide in her the secret he's carrying.

Again the cinematography—this time by Jordan Cronenweth—is much too grand for the material. (What ever happened to film noir?) Again the good guys are bulletproof. In the final shoot-out Penn stands face to face firing at people who fire at him. They die; he gets nicked in the arm. This last sequence is intercut with glimpses of the St. Patrick's Day parade. It's a feeble grab at some nebulous irony.

Another Film Festival choice was **The King of New York** (New Line). The cinematography by Bojan Bazelli is again overladen, the gunning down is incessant, as is the blue language, but at least the Mafia capo doesn't talk about ethics. The struggle here, over drug profits, is between Italians and a mixed gang of whites and blacks headed by Christopher Walken. The screenplay has a shred of a twist, not really an idea. Walken, lately released from prison to resume his drug kingship, wants to spend some of his money on social good works. But after a brief nod to this notion, nothing is done with it.

Abel Ferrara directed, glitziness and all, and includes the dumbest shoot-out in a long time—between Walken and a detective in a subway car. The detective walks into it deliberately, like John Wayne at the end of *Stagecoach*. Some reflection on the brains of the New York Police Department.

Some reflection, too, on the Plaza Hotel that Walken has his headquarters there, filled with riff and raff. Walken is a real actor, or has been, and he lends even this rickety screenplay a few moments of burning ice. But it's all mechanical and, even in sheer plot payoff, absolutely pointless.

In *Hamlet* King Claudius speaks of "a murdering piece" that "in many places gives me superfluous death." Though Claudius wasn't thinking of gangster films, the line comes to mind. •

"Every one of the contemporary social issues that command our attention has a history. If one can understand the causes and conditions that provoked a particular social problem, possibilities emerge for solving those concerns."

Louise Tilly: Historian

Louise Tilly is one of our country's most respected historians and Professor of History and Sociology in The Graduate Faculty.

With Joan Scott, she is the author of *Women, Work and Family.* She is currently studying popular politics, family and gender in 19th and 20th century France.

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What are intellectuals, anyway?

Word Power

BY LESZEK KOLAKOWSKI

The intellectuals: In God's menagerie, are they necessary? For what? Are they mediators or producers? If the latter, what do they produce? The word is just a tool of mediation: Are they, then, producers of tools of mediations? Since the earliest periods of the division of labor, mediators have probably been useful and necessary; they carried products from one location to another and were compensated in return. They did not produce anything, but they were indispensable to the spatial distribution of products. It was, still, physical work, the transferal of material goods.

In the history of trade economy, the division of labor continued to develop, but the tradesman did not need to move about any longer; he simply organized business, worked with a pencil and words. No longer did wealth require a physically visible form. Money separated more and more from material appearances: at one time it was cattle, then gold, then bank notes and bonds; and today our wealth consists mostly of electronic impulses in a bank computer, something invisible, almost abstract and incomprehensible. For centuries there has existed a comparatively numerous category of people who are no longer mediators in the old sense, but who deal with the substance of mediation itself; these people are bankers, usurers, and stockbrokers, and the medium of exchange has become a commodity itself.

The same has happened to the word, that is, to the medium for exchanging and mediating commodities of mind. Besides people who professionally transmitted information, doctrines, commands, traditions, and so forth—besides teachers, prophets, scribes, priests, and messengers—there emerged a class of people who utilized the word as working material, just as bankers used money. In their hands the word became autonomous, ceased to be a mere medium of exchange. It was treated as a value in itself. The invisible substance of the word asserted itself as an independent area of reality, instead of being functionally related to the transmission of information, of truths or lies, of feelings or wishes.

The sphere of power, which perhaps emerged originally from military and organizational functions, had assumed independence even earlier. And when these three auxiliary tools of communication and organization established their own domain of existence and their own principles, when they became autonomous, modern civil society was built on the three pillars of money, power, and the word. A process of self-enlargement and self-creation advances continuously in all these areas; and the money experts, the power holders, and the word architects (that is, the intellectuals) are agents in this marvelous process of self-accumulation. Owing to them, money produces more money, power produces more power, words produce more words.

The notion that this is really production has been repeatedly attacked, mostly by unsuccessful back-to-nature ideologies, which appeared within the last 150 years as a variety of anarchistic utopian ideas. Nothing, it was said, is actually produced in the spheres of money, power, and word. The existence of these three entities is only apparent; they are nothing, in reality, and cannot be more than instruments of communication. Their pseudo-independence, moreover, serves to perpetuate the irrational privilege of unproductive and idle social classes. As for the intellectuals, what are they but intellectual profiteers, producers of hollow words, babblers, parasites who continuously exploit their pretended superiority to strengthen or improve their own privileged status? The entire history of the anarchistic movement reflects a suspicion, even a hatred, of intellectuals.

It is hardly necessary to mention that all these execrations and attacks on intellectuals originated with intellectuals. It is tempting to view the act of questioning the usefulness of intellectuals as a practical antinomy: one must be an intellectual oneself in order to thunder convincingly against intellectuals. There is no other profession with such an innate tendency to question continuously its own legitimacy. At times we do ask, to be sure, why generals, or government, or bankers? But those questions are not asked by generals, or government officials, or bankers. And even if intellectuals do find good or bad reasons to justify their own existence, the frequency of such examination betrays a bad conscience, or at least the feeling that their legitimacy is never secure, or that the social or moral foundation of their work is not definite.

Why do intellectuals feel compelled to defend their right to exist? The answer is not difficult, and seems to be founded in the nature of language, hence of human existence. Ever since objects, actions, and attributes were named by Adam, reality, which had been perceptible without words, could not remain the same. The word does not operate only as the substitute for an object in certain circumstances, and it may not just represent or replace an object: the object itself is perceived through mediation of the word, it is provided with meaning in the process of perception. Not only is the word necessary to reproduce reality, it is also reality's co-producer. The object is what it is only within a linguistic network, only as its particle. The known world corresponds to this network, not on the basis of conventional symbolization, but in reciprocal determination, without either side taking precedence. The world is not simply reproduced in language, it is appropriated only in the form of language.

Since language is productive, moreover, it does not simply encompass the world. It also anticipates the possible and examines the unreal, even the impossible. It has the future tense, the interrogative form, the *modus irrealis* at its disposal. Thus it tends to question everything, including itself. It is a peculiarity of language that it has become not only autonomous, but self-reflective. Money became autonomous, but it cannot call itself into question. The word can. The intellectuals, therefore, those masters, manipulators, and tamers of the word, are producers of all possible worlds *and* all-questioning, all-doubting revolutionaries.

In saying this, we already presuppose a certain notion of the intellectual. Speaking of intellectuals as a class, we do not think of all those who simply convey the word as mediators, but more particularly of those who use it to obtrude a particular world perception on others, thereby to create a new world. A priest, who works primarily with linguistic means, is not as such an intellectual; it is his task to preserve in ritual the holy word of religious tradition, to transmit the inherited wisdom in sermons. Neither is a

LESZEK KOLAKOWSKI is the author most recently of *Modernity on Endless Trial*, a collection of essays to be published this fall by the University of Chicago Press.

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teacher as such an intellectual, when he endeavors to convey to the young the accumulated stock of knowledge and the techniques of thinking. Indeed, even scholars—linguists, historians, or archaeologists—are not intellectuals, as long as they attempt to remain true to the material found or discovered in order to describe it, and as long as they minimize their own intervention in the process. The intellectual is not a researcher or a discoverer in the strict sense. He lays claims beyond that: he uses the word to suggest his own world interpretation. He does not wish to transmit truth, but to create it. He is not a guardian of the word, but a manufacturer of it.

Is he, then, by definition, a liar? No, at least not necessarily. In lying, the word is used legitimately, so to speak: when we lie, we remain within the borders of the factual, we simply reverse, hide, or disfigure the facts as we know them. Lies are a normal component of human behavior in military, public, and private matters, and they do not require creative powers. Intellectuals are not liars, but seducers. A lie may occasionally aid in their work, of course, but it is not absolutely necessary. Drawing on the resources of the word, intellectuals desire to obtrude or to suggest a view of the world that facts alone—presented correctly or incorrectly—could never produce.

A view of the world does not emerge from an accumulation of facts. It requires words to interpret, to judge, and to order the facts. Thus, by attempting to uncover, that is, to produce, the meaning of facts, the intellectuals—philosophers, poets, writers of fiction, political thinkers—turn out to be ideologists. That is to say, they uphold an idea of the world as it ought to be, and from it they derive a picture of the world as it is, not in the sense that what exists converges with what is desired, but in the sense that from a world desired or imagined rules are derived for how the facts of the existing world must be interpreted—for what the facts, in their essence, are.

The intellectuals, at least in their own estimation, are masters and rulers of the word, not its servants. For that reason, they are destroyers of tradition, even if they attempt to preserve it with the best of intentions. To defend tradition on one's own means to question it. Plato wished to ban poets from the ideal state. He believed, rightly, that poets destroyed the legacy of morals through their manner of portraying the gods. But one may go further: even those who venerate tradition are dangerous when they appear as intellectuals. Had Plato followed his own argument, he would have recognized that he, too, would fall victim to his rules. The ideological state—Plato's ideal republic as well as the modern totalitarian state—does not need intellectuals, in the sense of people who independently question and take a position; it needs those who preserve the word of tradition, which provides legitimacy to established power without concessions. But the intellectuals—sophists in Socrates' Athens, early medieval dialecticians, or philosophers in the eighteenth century—always make themselves natural enemies of stability, either by relying on self-supported reason or by referring to other sources of wisdom independent of the ideological state.

All this is sufficiently obvious. Less obvious is the difficulty we encounter in distinguishing clearly between defenders and destroyers of established ideologies in the past and the present. Every established ideology occasionally has to make headway against unexpected circumstances and new dangers. When existing and proven means will not suffice, it takes people with a more imaginative faculty than the common ideological warrior to forge new intellectual weapons: it takes intellectuals. Usually they attempt to beat the enemy with his own weapons, to appropriate to themselves various components of a doctrine in order to render it innocuous within the transmitted ideology. The independent force of the word, however, carries them almost inevitably further than the defense requires; and for all their good intentions, they become destroyers of what they were determined to defend.

Indeed, they are often unable to avoid such destruction in order to succeed. Who was a more loyal guardian of church doctrine than Aquinas, when he attacked the Averroists' demands for the full autonomy of secular reason? In attacking them, however, he defined specific rules for how secular reason should be separated from faith, and established the boundaries of its relative autonomy. With this clear distinction, he exposed church doctrine to the same danger against which he had sought to defend it: from his adversaries he adopted a category that then solidified its rights against the church and Thomism.

Or, at the opposite pole in Christianity, who was a more irreconcilable enemy of secular reason, of dialectics, of philosophy than Calvin? By pitting his profound biblical conservatism against the haughtiness of scholasticism, however, he destroyed trust in the continuity of the Church as a source of interpretation of the doctrine. For the task of interpretation, he left to future generations only the very secular reason that he had vigor-

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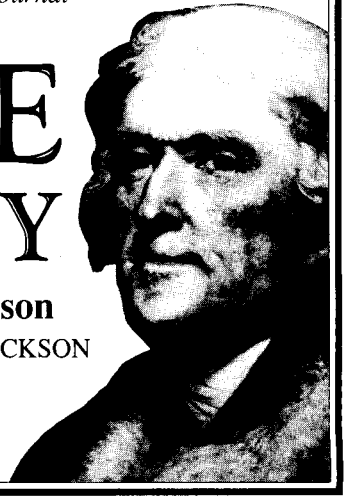

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ously condemned. In spite of Calvin's intentions, he created an intellectual environment that soon nurtured the advocates of natural religion and the deists: Descartes, with his irrefutable proofs of God's existence, contributed decisively to the development of European atheism, and the profoundly pious Bayle became the teacher par excellence of all the skeptics of the Enlightenment. The boundaries between great teachers and great heretics are never certain.

Or, to take a contemporary example, who was a more loyal bedfellow of communism than Lukacs? And yet all through his life he never managed to get on with the Party, and was repeatedly stigmatized as a renegade. His mind was not satisfied with being faithful; he aspired to improve Communist doctrine and to defend it even more forcefully than the Party chiefs, which led him to various errors. Intellectuals are responsible to a large extent for the spread and the consolidation of the Communist world, but they contributed enormously to its decline as well. Sooner or later, obedience proved to be unbearable; and those among the intellectuals who did not completely renounce obedience and attack the doctrine from the outside, those who attempted to improve it from within, were especially destructive.

To have intellectuals within the pale of an ideological institution causes endless vexation. At the same time, however, it shows that the institution is still alive, and still willing, to a certain degree, to confront new intellectual situations. In this sense, it is possible to say that Christianity is steadily alive and that communism is not.

The question of the so-called responsibility of the intellectual has been discussed for decades. Such debates are generally fruitless. Why should intellectuals be specifically and differently responsible than other people, and for what? If they are seducers, then they are able to seduce either to good or to evil. Still, as far as the distinction between good and evil in moral or political matters is concerned, are intellectuals necessarily more reliable, are they less fallible guides, than other people? Hardly. One would have thought that people who know somewhat more than most about the precariousness of all our judgments, who know better than most the history of many deceitful hopes and the failures of many excellent ideas, ought to be more reasonable in their political choices. As we all know, however, this is not always the case. The long history of the terrible errors that many intellectuals in our century have committed in their political choices has been described repeatedly; and it probably has contributed to the significant decline of their authority as leaders in political matters.

To talk about responsibility in the abstract is simple and unproductive: the intellectuals are hardly less divided, and not necessarily for any better reason, than everybody else. In the case of the intellectuals, the only specific matter for which they are professionally responsible is the good use—that is, the most upright and least misleading use—of the word. It is less a matter of truth than of the spirit of truth. Nobody can promise that he will never be mistaken, but it is possible to preserve the spirit of truth, which means never to abandon a vigilant mistrust of one's own words and identifications, always to know how to retract one's own errors, to be capable of self-correction.

If this sounds like trite nagging, so be it. One should consider, however, that no other profession (if the term profession is appropriate) creates a better opportunity for neurosis. No other profession creates so many colliding pretensions. Intellectuals often aspire to be prophets and heralds of reason, but those roles are incompatible. Occasionally boasting of it, they want to be intellectually independent; yet because of this independence, they experience a need for identification more than other people, and the very matter of which they boast generates in them a feeling of inferiority. Often they experience their freedom and their independence as a desert that renders them useless and isolated. But the tension between intellectual independence and total identification with an idea or a cause can never be resolved, except when the independence is given up. The need for identification may result in an almost unbelievable loss of critical reasoning, as has been confirmed by all the well-known intellectuals who identified themselves with Stalinism, Nazism, Maoism, and various fanatical sects.

One would expect intellectuals to be interested in freedom of speech—for professional reasons, if not for reasons of principle. Usually that is the case. But they desire something else, too: they want to be heard. And the only sure way to be heard is to enjoy a word monopoly. The intellectuals cannot create such a monopoly themselves; it can only be granted to them by a despotic power, at the price of their being enslaved. There are reasons to believe that, in the first phase after the Russian Revolution, the intellectuals contributed to their own subsequent destruction, as various groups attempted to secure privileges or even a monopoly from the rulers.

Freedom of the word, moreover, is by no means universally accepted by intellectuals as a matter of course. It is remarkable that Heidegger, in an interview posthumously published by *Der Spiegel*, confirmed his criticism of academic freedom, which originated in Nazi times; it was, he said, merely a "negative freedom." (As if there is any other freedom than a "negative" one.) Marcuse's fierce attacks against the idea and the practice of tolerance also come to mind. Such cases are the result of dreams of a monopoly on words, guaranteed by governmental powers. This is expressed, of course, as the claim to a monopoly on truth.

Among such intellectuals, perhaps some would be willing (this is only a suspicion) to accept employment as privileged court philosophers to enlightened despots. Oddly enough, though, there are no enlightened despots in our century, no absolute rulers, as in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, who support intellectuals for the price of a flattering dedication or other occasional encomiums, but otherwise leave them the freedom of creation. Today's despots need intellectuals inasmuch as they are no longer intellectuals, inasmuch as they can be bought as slaves and devote all their work to their masters. In the century of totalitarianism, the time of enlightened autocrats has passed.

And still more interesting is the cult of power that runs through the history of intellectuals, covertly or in articulated form. The paradigm, of course, is Nietzsche, on the brink of his final intellectual deterioration in Turin, who voiced his violent attack against Christianity as the glorification of disease. The sad prophet of health and vigor was a genius of seduction, no doubt, but he was also a model to those who were never satisfied with their role as powerless word producers.

Are we talking about matters that belong to the past? To some extent, perhaps. After so many horrible mistakes, intellectuals are on the whole probably more careful in their political commitments. Compared with the enormous vogue of Stalinism, the attraction of Maoism (a period, fortunately, that has passed as well) proved to be weaker, even at the peak of its popularity. There is much less willingness to offer unconditional support to existing ideologies, and more of an inclination to keep a distance from political matters, with a consequent tendency to withdraw into more secure and specialized areas. As a result, we probably have fewer influential lunatics and swindlers, and also fewer teachers.

Still, the circumstances that create an incurable uneasiness for intellectuals,

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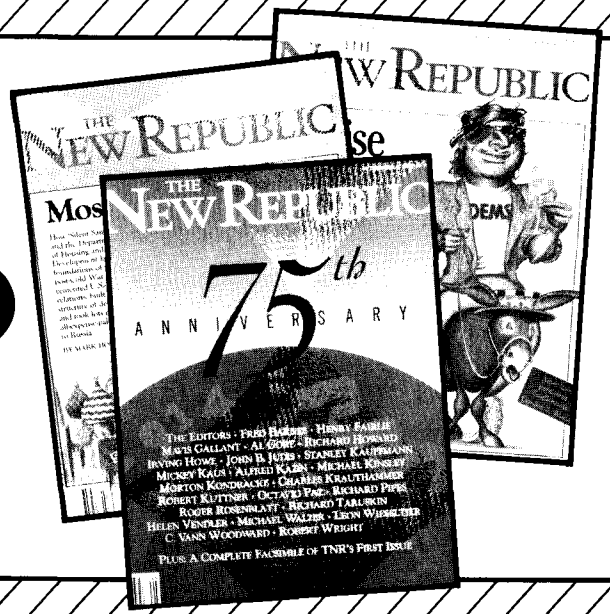

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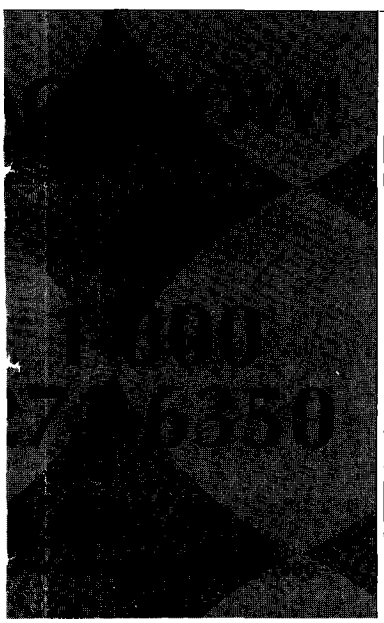

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that nurture their contradictory feelings, are always present. On the one hand, there is the contempt for ordinary people; on the other hand, the desire for solidarity with the oppressed and the poor, which often results in a purely cerebral identification with ideologies that have made themselves champions of the demands of the masses. The contempt for ordinary people was, to a large degree, a part of the anti-Americanism of European intellectuals, to which the German war emigrants to the United States contributed. This tendency was expressed frequently by the Frankfurt School. One could almost feel the envy mixed with the abhorrence of the culture of the American middle classes, of people who were successful technologically as well as in shaping democratic institutions, but did not read Kant, did not listen to Bach, did not confer on intellectuals a superhuman status of honor.

A never-ending inner struggle takes place in the souls of intellectuals. They are torn between a feeling of their superiority, their special mission, and a secret envy of humans whose work bears visible and verifiable results. Writing about the superiority of criticism compared to literature, Wilde argued that it is generally easier to make something than to talk about it: it is easier to make a bed than to describe the process of making it. Mickiewicz, by contrast, wrote "that it is more difficult to live well through one day than to write a long book." I don't know if Wilde ever attempted to make a bed, but Mickiewicz's remark appears to be inhumanly exaggerated.

Perhaps intellectuals have the "right" to feel insecure about their status, about the value of their work. What tangible results does the work of an intellectual yield? There are, of course, several examples of intellectuals who exerted an enormous influence on their eras, and thus on the course of world history. But we must note that, first, such examples represent only a small number of the relatively large population of intellectuals; second, that a long time must usually pass before such influence is measurable; and third (this is the most embarrassing), that the real results are forever contestable and uncertain.

The original model of the intellectual in modern history was certainly Erasmus of Rotterdam, but even today his historic role is controversial. Was he a restorer or a destroyer of Christianity? Too many more or less arbitrary criteria must be considered to answer such questions unequivocally. Similar questions may be asked about almost all great intellectuals who have contributed to Europe's intellectual and political history, again without reaching definite answers. Tensions between a typical intellectual like Melanchthon and a popular tribune like Luther could hardly be avoided, and when intellectuals attempted to be popular leaders or professional politicians themselves, the results were usually far from encouraging. The marketplace of words, with all its dangers, is a more appropriate place for intellectuals, in the end, than a king's court. •

Speed-the-Brow

BY DAVID VAN LEER

Some Freaks
by David Mamet
(Viking, 180 pp., $16.95)

We're No Angels
A screenplay by David Mamet
(Grove Weidenfeld, 131 pp., $7.95)

The Hero Pony
Poems by David Mamet
(Grove Weidenfeld, 64 pp., $16.95)

In the past fifteen years David Mamet has established himself as one of our most powerful playwrights. Best known for *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, *American Buffalo*, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, and *Speed-the-Plow*, he is praised for the contemporaneity of his deadbeat settings and characters, for the honesty of his gritty dialogue, for the intensity of his moral vision. Not simply a chronicler of modern life, Mamet is a prophet decrying the dark underside of the American dream. Yet *Some Freaks*, his second book of essays, possesses so little of the style, wit, intelligence, or intensity usually claimed for him that one finishes the embarrassing collection wondering what Mamet's reputation for high seriousness could possibly be based on. Even more disappointing, Mamet himself seems totally unaware of his failure.

The volume is a hodgepodge of speeches and journalism, reprinted from such unlikely places as *Sports Illustrated*, *Penthouse*, and *Lincoln Center Theatre Company Magazine*. Every page exudes a self-importance far exceeding the originality of the thinking and the elegance of the writing. The only interesting essays are the few in which Mamet considers his Jewish heritage. Next best are the bland personal accounts of youth in Chicago or summers in Vermont, inoffensive pieces reminiscent of Jean Kerr or Erma Bombeck without the bite. But whenever Mamet aims for bigger game—art or politics or sex or kryptonite—he falls consistently short, in a sententious prose Solemnly Capitalized and religiously committed to the split infinitive.

Mamet's ideas are as haphazard as his sentences. The essays are full of specious generalizations—that some of Jesus' teachings are "weak" and "anti-labor," or that "women do not, on the whole, get *along* with women." Trite observations masquerade as insights. *Shane* and *Bad Day at Black Rock* are deemed "the *true* stuff of the American Dream" and, Mamet cautions, the Mouseketeers did not *really* like us. Most distressing, the arguments often reaffirm the very clichés that they mean to overturn. In the title essay, for example, Mamet examines the elitism and the self-congratulation built into the Romantic notion of the artist as an isolated "freak," yet what begins as an attack on the belief that artists are better than businessmen ends by celebrating that "freakish" superiority.

Part of the problem is Mamet's difficulty reconciling his intellect with his notion of masculinity. Obviously well read, Mamet peppers his analysis with references to Veblen, Jung, Stanislavsky, and Eisenstein. Yet he favors a kind of intellectual anti-intellectualism—the desire to be profound and to deny that profound is the sort of thing a real man

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would want to be. Following the macho lead of Ernest Hemingway and Norman Mailer, Mamet flaunts his knowledge of poker tables, pool halls, guerrilla warfare, and prides himself on being a "card-carrying member of the ACLU *and* the NRA." He applauds his sexual open-mindedness in characterizing straight male bonding as very latent homosexuality: "That Fun Which Dare Not Speak Its Name." And in a predictably elitist inversion, he dismisses as insufferably highbrow the achievements of Dickens, Dostoyevsky, James, and Mozart, while proclaiming television's Tyne Daly as "surely one of our *finest* actresses, a model artist."

Such neo-philistinism is a time-honored trick of the anxious intellectual, at least as old as Walt Whitman's unconvincing insistence that he was one of the toughs. And in general the inadequacies of *Some Freaks* would be unremarkable had the collection not been followed so quickly by two equally insipid volumes—*The Hero Pony*, Mamet's first book of poems, and *We're No Angels*, his most recent screenplay. Operating on the principle that Mamet's every syllable must see print, his publishers have in addition announced for winter a book on film directing (Mamet has directed two movies). In his verse, Mamet has mastered alliteration and some rhymes. Yet, as its cloying title suggests, *The Hero Pony* combines an inflated sense of self-importance with a disingenuously cute poetic voice. Mamet treats such familiar themes as marital love, artistic creativity, and cosmic absurdity in a wide range of styles from Wallace Stevens and John Ashbery to Mother Goose and Hallmark. Confusing inexperience with innocence, the poems alternate tired metaphors ("Our love is butter / And the world is bread") with shallow profundities ("Below a world of transportation / There is a school of thought").

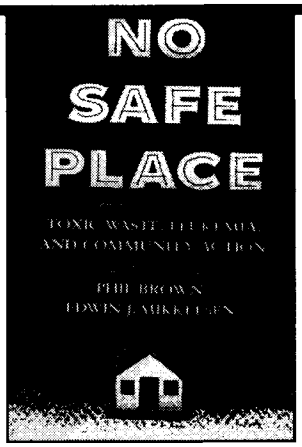
The banality of *The Hero Pony* is not surprising. Many macho prose styles go limp when they turn to poetry. More distressing is Mamet's screenplay for last winter's critical and commercial failure *We're No Angels*. Mamet's reputation as a screenwriter is less secure than as a playwright. He began in 1980 with a rewrite of James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (which was first filmed in 1946) and went on to convert Barry Reed's novel into the Paul Newman vehicle *The Verdict* (1982), for which he received an Oscar nomination. These adaptations were followed by original screenplays for *The Untouchables* (1987), *House of Games* (1987), and *Things Change* (1988), the last two of which Mamet directed as well.

The films lacked the strengths of Mamet's theater. The rapid-fire dialogue of the plays was replaced on screen by cryptic understatement and soulful art-film silences. The plots were sloppy and the characters were undermotivated. In the climactic trial sequence of *The Verdict*, the testimony by an eleventh-hour witness was dramatically irrelevant: it was declared inadmissible as courtroom evidence without revealing anything new about the situation or the characters. And in the surprise murder that ended *House of Games*, the victim spewed blood and theme lines as an easy way of wrapping up the film.

Despite the movies' moralistic tones, their morals were not even all that clear. Virtue rarely depended on anything as concrete as a good deed. The hero of *The Verdict* was a disillusioned lawyer so concerned with salvaging an ideal image of justice (and of his own self-worth) that he almost lost the case for his deserving clients; audiences tolerated such a sanctimonious prig only because he was played by Paul Newman. Corruption seemed more interesting. In *The Untouchables* neither Mamet, nor director Brian De Palma, nor actor Kevin Costner ever figured out how to breathe life into straight-arrow Eliot Ness, and Al Capone walked off with the movie and audience sympathies.

Given this uneven record, the publication of *We're No Angels* seems at best a miscalculation, at worst a mystery. In its 1955 movie version, this much recycled plot presented Humphrey Bogart as one of three nineteenth-century convicts escaped from Devil's Island to work miracles at Christmastide (with the aid of an obliging viper). Mamet updated the story half a century into the 1930s, relocated it near the Canadian border on the feast of the town saint, substituted Robert De Niro for Bogart, and eliminated the snake. Yet the rewrite suffered from its own irrelevance. Except for the commercial pairing of De Niro with teen heartthrob Sean Penn, there was no reason for refilming so forgettable a movie.

It is hard to imagine a less likely author for such cornball material than Mamet, and all his attention to atmosphere and detail could not disguise the inappropriateness of the assignment. His secular cynicism worked against the story's Christian moralism, with its sentimental theme that strangers may be "angels unawares." In Mamet's delineation of the character, Penn's spirituality was indistinguishable from imbecility, and the watery miracle that ended the film—half *The Miracle Worker* and half *Butch Cassidy*—seemed virtually sacrilegious. Mamet was not even able to construct from these raw materials a serviceable plot; he



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reduced the third convict to a sociopathic cameo, who reappeared with pistols blazing whenever the movie bogged down in its own piety, and the characters' goal—the escape across a bridge into Canada—was so uninteresting, and so lacking in visual suspense, that the camera all but forgot to remark its occurrence in the film's final frames.

The question is not why Mamet was reduced to writing Christmas movies (that answer is easy to guess), but why he permitted the screenplay's publication. To understand what is going wrong in Mamet's recent writing, however, we must recall his more auspicious beginnings. Mamet first received national attention with the New York productions of *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* and *American Buffalo* in the mid-1970s. *Perversity* dealt candidly with modern relationships, depicting in a series of brief skits the coupling and subsequent estrangement of two insecure young people, as abetted by their cynical best friends. The dialogue was consistently vulgar, but it was clever:

DANNY: Do you like the taste of come?

DEBORAH: Dan, I love the taste of come. It tastes like everything . . . *good* . . . just . . . *coming* out of your cock . . . the Junior Prom . . . an autumn afternoon. . . .

DANNY: It doesn't taste a little bit like Chlorox?

DEBORAH: It *smells* like Chlorox. It tastes like the Junior Prom.

American Buffalo was more complex, examining our definitions of success and loyalty in terms of a symbiotic relationship between three would-be thieves. A low-rent version of Chekhov's *The Three Sisters*, the play took place in the shop of a junk dealer, who with an addict and a small-time hood dreamed futilely of stealing a coin collection. Superimposing the extreme vulgarity of street slang onto the deadpan rhythms of Beckett, Ionesco, and Pinter, Mamet created for his aspiring criminals a dramatic language both idiomatic and poetic, rivaling that of Marlon Brando's longshoreman in *On the Waterfront*.

TEACH: I should have a nickel every time we're over at the game, I pop for coffee . . . cigarettes . . . a *sweet roll*, never say a word. . . . Someone is *against* me, that's their problem. . . I can look out for myself, and I don't got to fuck around behind somebody's back, I don't like the way they're treating me. Or pray some brick *safe* falls and hits them on the head, they're walking down the street. But to have that shithead turn, in one breath, every fucking sweet roll that I ever ate with them into *ground glass*. I'm wondering were they eating it and thinking "This guy's an idiot to blow a fucking *quarter* on his friends" . . . this hurts me, Don. This hurts me in a way I don't know what the fuck to do.

(Pause)

DON: You're probably just upset.

To an audience still reeling from Vietnam and Watergate, Mamet's brutality and nihilism seemed healthy correctives to the platitudinous optimism of the 1960s. Yet there were limits to this technique. The vulgarity quickly became wearisome. As Mamet himself has admitted, people "say 'Fuck' in direct proportion to how bored they are." The repetition through which he created his poetic inarticulateness left little time for characterization or plot development. His characters were simple types—young lovers, addicts, petty thieves. And his plots—boy meets girl, boy loses girl; thieves plan a robbery, thieves do not execute a robbery—were merely skeletons on which to hang his fleshy dialogue.

More important, the moral ambiguities that plagued the films subtly informed the plays as well. The verbal facility of the more reprehensible characters often obscured the plays' indignation at their behavior. In *Perversity*, the boy's overbearing male friend regularly stole the show with his misogynist accounts of sexual conquests. (The part made the career of James Belushi, both when he performed it onstage and when he revived it in the sanitized film version, *About Last Night* . . . .) Similarly, the moral center of *American Buffalo* lay in the relation between Don the junk dealer and Bobby the addict. Yet productions of the play invariably became star turns for the actor playing the flashier role of the violent hood Teach (Robert Duvall in the original Broadway staging, Al Pacino in the 1984 revival).

Comparable inconsistencies marred Mamet's finest play, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, for which he won the Pulitzer Prize in 1984. Focusing on the competition within a real estate agency, Mamet explored one of his favorite topics—"the language of American Business"—in a series of rapid-fire exchanges (and scams) between the brokers. The script allowed for the kind of ensemble acting that guaranteed an electrifying evening in the theater. Yet the plot, which involved a theft within the agency, got lost in the dramatic fireworks. And the dialogue, in its fury, at times degenerated into mere invective:

ROMA: Oh, *fuck*. *Fuck*. (He starts kicking the desk.) FUCK FUCK FUCK! WILLIAMSON!!! WILLIAMSON!!! (Goes to the door Williamson went into, tries the door; it's locked.) OPEN THE FUCKING . . . WILLIAMSON . . .

For all the power of the performances, it was difficult to know how to respond to such material. Mamet's distaste for the situation was clear enough. Still, nothing but a fashionable despair followed upon that distaste. And the amorality of huckster businessmen was not exactly news; it has been deplored everywhere on the American stage, from *The Iceman Cometh* to *The Music Man*. If anything, Mamet's outrage was less than that of his predecessors. While abhorring the vile means by which the salesmen succeeded, the play gloried in the ingenuity of their vileness. And Mamet's penchant for downbeat endings seemed in this case arbitrary and mean; in *Glengarry*'s final minutes, its most sympathetic character, an aging spokesman for professionalism and team spirit, was without justification revealed as both thief and fool, leaving his heartless protégé to walk off with audience admiration (and acting honors). It was as if the opportunistic nephew Bernard had replaced Willy Loman as the protagonist of *Death of a Salesman*.

These tensions between moral outrage and cynical admiration became even less palatable in *Speed-the-Plow*. To date Mamet's most recent Broadway production, this three-character play of 1988 followed a producer's momentary dilemma about whether to film a star vehicle as his crass friend wishes or a prestigious novel about radiation as his secretary suggests. Full of witty (and knowing) jibes at Hollywood values, the play worked all of Mamet's customary moral inversions, finally exposing the secretary's high tone as opportunistic. And while the boss and his secretary wrestled with the niceties of the situation, the friend deflated all pretenses with his unapologetic greed (and, as always, copped the Tony).

In Mamet's previous work, the ethical uncertainty of the situation could seem tantalizing, perhaps even the point of the play. In *Speed-the-Plow*, however, the ambiguities were cheap and the ironies were self-congratulatory. Not only was the "classy" novel itself obviously a piece of pretentious dreck, but Hollywood superficiality was too easy a target. Instead of undermining his audience's sense of moral superiority, Mamet pandered to it. No one ever lost money preaching in New York the shallowness of Los Angeles. Moreover, the casting of the rock star Madonna as the secretary embodied precisely the commercialism that the script claimed to attack. The play itself became a star vehicle, a canny career move. Yet Mamet encouraged his audience to remain smugly aloof. We were not groupies, finally, for a box at the Royale Theatre was different from general admission to "Blond Ambition" at the Meadowlands.

Given the confusion, even the dishonesty, of *Speed-the-Plow*, one wonders whether Mamet, for all his anger, has ever been a reliable moral guide. His dia-

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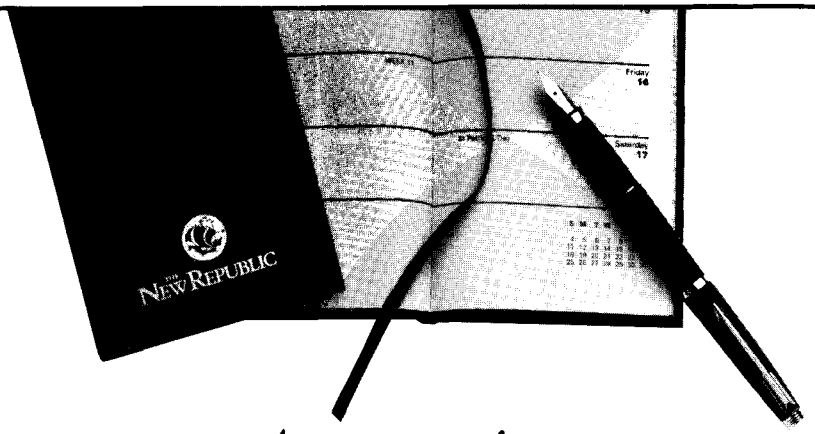
tribes do not really take risks. In exploring the lower depths, he rarely attacks anything cherished by his middle-class audience. At the same time, the racism, the sexism, and the homophobia of his characters are not effectively defused by their author, and Mamet may seriously misjudge the psychological effect of so regularly venting those emotions in his work. As he himself implies in a disturbing scene in *Edmond* (1983), such hatreds always lurk beneath the surface of middle-class gentility, eager for expression. The venom in Mamet's plays permits audiences to credit their own worst biases under the cover of moral distance. And when we applaud (and award) Mamet's most villainous characters, we may secretly be celebrating the prejudices as fully as the performances.

Mamet would probably claim, like most postmodern artists from Wallace Shawn and Eric Bogosian to Andrew Dice Clay, that his satiric method (and his liberal upbringing) distinguishes his voice from that of his prejudiced characters. That is why the complacency of his non-fiction, where Mamet writes in his own voice, is so discouraging. His preoccupations—the language of business, the "American Loves" of the game of skill and the short con, sex as "the true nature of the world"—are of course all unapologetically (and perhaps exclusively) male. More important, they are relentlessly universalizing, assuming the existence of some underlying mythic abstraction, usually called Truth or America. His belief in homogeneous universals permits moral judgments, but it does so only by applying the same absolute standard to all people in all situations. Whatever the apparent modernity of Mamet's plays, his judgmental tone most recalls the work of Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and the other Jazz Age Jeremiahs. He reproduces not only their moral seriousness, but also their WASPish self-satisfaction with the spurious "truths" of manliness and inside knowledge.

Mamet's moralism is probably neither insincere nor intentionally old-fashioned. The problem resides not in his politics, but in his dramaturgy. Mamet's lack of interest in plot results from his development as a playwright. Beginning as an acting teacher, he turned to writing to provide his students with scenes to perform. It is not surprising, then, that sequences in Mamet's works play like acting exercises. Yet the sketchy plots and characterizations also reflect his fondness for abstraction. Despite the specificity and variety of Mamet's settings—a junk shop, a real estate agency, a producer's office, the Canadian border—all the plays take



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place in a single generalized landscape, vaguely urban and modern. Just as there is no difference between locations, so all people are essentially identical. Not only are all Mamet's characters stereotypes, but his lovers, brokers, producers, and convicts-turned-monks all speak the same Mametese. For him, "the model of the perfect play is the dirty joke," drama stripped to the bare essentials of barn, salesman, and farmer's daughter.

Mamet's reliance on generalization and stereotype is the indirect legacy of Stanislavsky's influence on acting as practiced in America. There is no denying the contributions of Lee Strasberg, Sanford Meisner, and other reinterpreters of Stanislavsky in training a sophisticated roster of American actors. Nor can one fault Mamet for providing showcases for some of our most talented performers, especially Robert De Niro and Joe Mantegna. Yet one must at the same time recognize that the cultural assumptions of this approach were specific to the time that produced it, and especially to the decade after World War II, when it exercised its greatest influence on American theater.

Stanislavskian performances in America emphasized the universality of the dramatic situation, in which actor and character (and presumably audience) were all roughly on the same level and in agreement. The method succeeded best with contemporary works sharing its faith in abstract truths. The plays' plots were commonly symbolic, as in *The Glass Menagerie* or *A Streetcar Named Desire*, or mythic, as in *Death of a Salesman* or *A View from the Bridge*. Their politics tended toward extremes—either conservative, as in the anti-union *On the Waterfront*, or radical, as in the pro-strike *Waiting for Lefty*. Their characterizations emphasized the psychological inevitability of Freud as he was understood in midcentury. With more alienating and ambiguous playwrights like Strindberg, Brecht, or O'Neill, the performance style was not successful.

The universalizing assumptions of American Stanislavskism hold little interest today. Symbolism and myth are no longer our preferred rhetorical vocabularies. The political excesses of 1930s Marxism and 1950s isolationism embarrass many former adherents. The sexism and the homophobia of midcentury Freudianism have led some to reinterpret Freud's original writings, others to reject him altogether. And although they are still considered powerful playwrights, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller are currently admired less as great truth-tellers than as superior representatives of their particular literary traditions—Southern gothic, gay, Jewish-American.

For we are no longer certain that people are basically all the same. Modern cultural debates—from referendums on bilingualism to the *Miss Saigon* brouhaha—concern the importance of ethnic difference and subcultural integrity. And to the extent that Mamet's theatrical methods presuppose cultural uniformity, his moral pronouncements seem beside the point. We do not care whether "thieves" are loyal or "secretaries" on the make, for we doubt the similarity of all thieves and all secretaries. We want to understand, instead, the social conditions and individual temperaments that lie behind a person's descent into theft or drug addiction. And even fairy tales like *Working Girl* or *Pretty Woman* (not to mention "Material Girl") represent more specifically than *Speed-the-Plow* the variety of ways in which women today negotiate the marketplace.

By chronicling the American love of "skill and the short con," Mamet found dogmas that could pass for morality in the depleted 1970s. But to the extent that these were just the pieties of another age's theatrical technique, he has taken us not beyond Watergate, he has taken us back to Disneyland. And in fretting over the Mouseketeers' honesty, Mamet reveals himself to be just one more casualty of the very Hollywood platitudes that he aims to expose.

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Coming Home

BY CHRISTOPHER BENFEY

Omeros by Derek Walcott

(Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 325 pp., $25)

In one of her poems, Emily Dickinson divides the things of the world into those that fly ("Birds—Hours—the Bumblebee") and those that stay ("Grief—Hills—Eternity"). The division might be applied to poets. Dickinson herself was notoriously a stayer, and so in their different ways were Marianne Moore, William Carlos Williams, and—once he'd found a resting place in New England—Robert Frost. Among the poets of flight, one thinks of Eliot and Pound, and of Elizabeth Bishop, who split her time between Boston and Brazil.

Bishop especially took what she called "questions of travel" as her province, and the same could be said of the sometimes Trinidadian, sometimes Bostonian Derek Walcott. Among his footloose titles are "The Fortunate Traveller," "The Schooner *Flight*," "North and South" (the name, it happens, of one of Bishop's books as well). Travel, its initial release and eventual travail, has been Walcott's theme from the beginning. He has portrayed himself again and again as a poet caught between two worlds. "Between" is perhaps the key word in his poetry. One could make a plausible argument that he is by now as much a poet of the United States as of the Caribbean. His distinctive voice, sardonic and celebratory by turns, has entered the resources of our language and literature.

Walcott and his twin brother were born in 1930 on the island of St. Lucia, in the former British colony of the Windward Islands (Lesser Antilles). Their father was an amateur painter who died before the twins were one year old. Painting was Walcott's first choice of a career (this chapter of the growth of the poet's mind is vividly described in Walcott's long autobiographical poem of 1973, *Another Life*), and his poetry has always appealed as much to the eye as to the ear. His schoolteacher mother ensured that he got what he called "a sound colonial education." His religious upbringing was Methodist—"The passionate, pragmatic / Methodism of my infancy." There has always been a tension in Walcott's poetry between a plain-speaking, lower-church language (he admires such subtle and unemphatic poets as Edward Thomas and Thomas Hardy) and the more flamboyant verbal fireworks of the largely Catholic (and French-speaking) culture he grew up in. Grandson of two white men and two black women, he has written of himself as a "divided child," nourished on one side by the Caribbean culture of illiterate fishermen and educated on the other by the empire-building British.

As a consequence, Walcott has never ceased asking the barrage of questions that concludes his famous early poem of

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1962, with its richly ambiguous title, "A Far Cry from Africa":

> I who am poisoned with the blood of both,
> Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?
> I who have cursed
> The drunken officer of British rule, how choose
> Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?
> Betray them both, or give back what they give?
> How can I face such slaughter and be cool?
> How can I turn from Africa and live?

By the time Walcott wrote his great poem "The Schooner *Flight*" in 1979, he had come to see this division as cause for celebration. His narrator, who is cool *and* African, proclaims in deliberate patois:

> I'm just a red nigger who love the sea,
> I had a sound colonial education,
> I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me,
> and either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation.

For Walcott's appropriating imagination, the temptation has been to see his native island in European terms (remembering forgivingly, as he does in an early poem, that "Albion too was once / A colony like ours"), to establish correspondences between a Caribbean present and a classical, European past. Homeric parallels especially intrude early and late, as when, in *Another Life*, Walcott finds himself comparing his hometown of Castries on St. Lucia to ancient Troy, while Helen becomes a local prostitute:

> Janie, the town's one clear-complexioned whore,
> with two tow-headed children in her tow,
> she sleeps with sailors only, her black hair electrical
> as all that trouble over Troy. . .

In the same poem Walcott wryly defends such attributions of epic importance, claiming the liberties of youth:

> Provincialism loves the pseudo-epic,
> so if these heroes have been given a stature
> disproportionate to their cramped lives,
> remember I beheld them at knee-height,
> and that their thunderous exchanges
> rumbled like gods about another life . . .

More recently, however, he has seemed bent on exorcising the epic, as though to purge his birthplace of meanings imposed, like governors, from the outside. In a poem called "Greece" from *The Fortunate Traveller* (1981), written when he had just turned 50, Walcott imagines the classical corpus of texts as a bleeding body he's carrying to burial:

> The body that I had thrown down at my foot
> was not really a body but a great book
> still fluttering like chitons on a frieze,
> till wind worked through the binding of its pages
> scattering Hector's and Achilles' rages
> to white, diminishing scraps, like gulls that ease
> past the gray sphinxes of the crouching islands.

The passage bristles, like many of Walcott's, with implicit puns, on "corpus" and "corpse"; but also between the words "frieze" and "wind" one hears the unspoken "breeze." The unbound pages opening like birds' wings constitute the sort of textual metaphor that has proliferated in Walcott's recent work. From *Omeros*: "the calligraphy of swallows" and the "flotilla of swallows memorizing an alphabet." In a baroque mirroring, birds are books and books are birds.

No poetic gesture, of course, is more American than the banishing of epic. Poe in 1850 denounced what he diagnosed as "the epic mania" in the United States, especially acute in Longfellow and his fellow travelers, and proclaimed that a long poem was "simply a flat contradiction in terms." Whitman invited the muse to "migrate from Greece and Ionia," leaving her baggage behind: "Cross out please those immensely overpaid accounts, / That matter of Troy and Achilles' wrath, and Aeneas', Odysseus' wanderings . . ." While American poets like to make a big show of banishing the epic muse, however, they are just as likely to let her in by the back door. Whitman wanted his muse to put Parnassus up for rent, and take up residence "amid the kitchen ware"—a rather servile position, one might think, though perhaps with its own subversive possibilities. (In *Another Life*, Walcott wrote that he "had entered the house of literature as a houseboy.")

In Walcott's new and very long poem *Omeros*, epic ambitions resurface with a vengeance. The poem was conceived, he informs us, in an erotic encounter between the narrator-poet and a Greek girlfriend who pronounces the name of her national poet in the Greek fashion: "Omeros." "Homer and Virg are New England farmers," Walcott counters dismissively, "and the winged horse guards their gas-station." But the seductive pull of verbal association has him in thrall:

> I said, "Omeros,"
>
> and *O* was the conch-shell's invocation, *mer* was
> both mother and sea in our Antillean patois,
> *os*, a grey bone, and the white surf as it crashes
>
> and spreads its sibilant collar on a lace shore.

"I miss my islands," says the Greek woman, and so does Walcott, who returns to repeople his own with epic characters.

It is precisely "amid the kitchen ware" that the poet finds his Helen: she is the maid in a household of British colonial-

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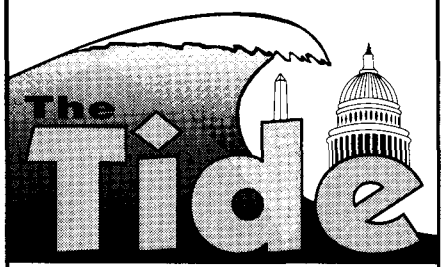

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ists called the Plunketts. Like her classical counterpart, Helen is married to one man but sleeps with another. Her husband, Achille, the hero of *Omeros*, is a fisherman who spends his days in a canoe called "In God We Troust." Her lover Hector has traded in his canoe for a taxi. While Achille lives in the older world of natural rhythms—wind, sand, surf, and stars—Hector has embraced the new world of tourism and speed. The quarrel between the two fisherman/warriors is also a quarrel between past and present, tradition and modernity, Africa and Europe.

Walcott fills out his cast of characters with a local blind bard called St. Omere, nicknamed (or rather brandnamed) "Seven Seas," and a fisherman called Philoctete whose leg has been scarred by a rusted anchor. (Actually there are two Philoctetes characters in *Omeros*, for Plunkett is suffering from an ancient head wound. "This wound I have stitched into Plunkett's character," Walcott's narrator says in a self-conscious and illusion-breaking moment. "He has to be wounded, affliction is one theme / of this work, this fiction . . ." Stitched, too, are the linked sounds of "stitched . . . affliction . . . fiction.")

To summarize the plot of *Omeros* would be tedious and misleading, for the life of the poem lies not so much in the amorous intrigues of the characters, who remain rather hypothetical and stereotyped. The book is better read as a sort of fantasy on Homeric themes, a complex instrument by which Walcott can follow freely the associations of name and history that any given character allows him. Some of these imaginative journeys, it seems to me, are misguided—for example, the bathetic trips to the American West and South, when Walcott hammers home the familiar ironies of a nation founded on freedom that indulged in genocide and slavery: "all colonies inherit their empire's sin, / and these, who broke free of the net, enmeshed a race." I could also have done without the journey to Ireland, as Walcott follows his character Maud Plunkett back to her ancestral County Wicklow, and weaves a medley on Irish themes, including the recent Troubles.

More convincing is the evocation of Achille, marooned on an island and hallucinating in the sunlight, who imagines himself retracing the "middle passage" of manacled Africans, walking "for three hundred years / in the silken wake like a ribbon of the galleons." In a fine Sophoclean hymn to man as maker, Walcott finds the roots of artistic creation in the manacles of enslavement:

> The worst crime is to leave a man's hands
> empty.
> Men are born makers, with that primal
> simplicity
> in every maker since Adam. This is pre-
> history,
>
> that itching instinct in the criss-crossed net
> of their palms, its wickerwork. They could
> not
> stay idle too long. The chained wrists
> couldn't forget
>
> the carver for whom antelopes leapt, or
> the bow-maker the shaft, or the armourer
> his nail-studs, the shield held up to Hector
>
> that was the hammerer's art.

Walcott's writing is at its tactile best in such passages, the alliterative weaving of "that itching instinct in the criss-crossed net / of their palms, its wickerwork." The men wait in the hold of the slave ship, each one carrying "the nameless freight of himself to the other world," until they arrive at "dry sand their soles knew. Sand they could recognize."

In a pivotal Dantesque scene, Walcott encounters the shade of his father, who points to a line of women carrying baskets of coal on their heads to load onto a ship. Walcott's father finds in this task a metaphor for the writing of poetry:

> Kneel to your load, then balance your
> staggering feet
> and walk up that coal ladder as they do in
> time,
> one bare foot after the next in ancestral
> rhyme.
>
> Because Rhyme remains the parentheses
> of palms
> shielding a candle's tongue, it is the
> language's
> desire to enclose the loved world in its
> arms;
>
> or heft a coal-basket; only by its stages
> like those groaning women will you
> achieve that height
> whose wooden planks in couplets lift your
> pages
>
> higher than those hills of infernal
> anthracite.

The son's duty, Walcott *père* concludes, is "to give those feet a voice." The scene might be compared, for uncanny power, with Seamus Heaney's central poem in which, watching his father toiling with a spade, he grasps his squat pen and says, "I'll dig with it."

The "feet" that Walcott has chosen for *Omeros* have epic ambitions as well. The loose terza rima, borrowed from the *Divine Comedy*, accommodates a great variety of rhyming—off, near, and the sort of consonantal rhyming so dear to Wilfred Owen. Standing in the printery that was once his house, Walcott has a vision of his mother sewing:

> The hum
> of the wheel's elbow stopped. And there
> was a figure
> framed in the quiet window for whom this
> was home,
> tracing its dust, rubbing thumb and
> middle finger,
> then coming to me, not past, but through
> the machines.

But Walcott's choice of meter ("Time is the metre, memory the only plot") is a strange one. There have been many experiments in translating Greek and Latin hexameters into English. Poe himself attacked Longfellow's attempts, and Richmond Lattimore's translation of the *Iliad* may be the best-known contemporary example. But Walcott has not adopted the familiar practice of adding another stressed foot to an iambic pentameter line. Instead, he has opted for a line of twelve syllables (with occasional fudging) and varying rhythm.

This seems, to my ear, an odd solution. Syllabic verse, in Marianne Moore for example, depends for its effects on variation in line-length, thus playing with the expectations of ear and eye. But it's hard to hear the twelve syllables in line after line without flattening one's sense of their natural emphasis. The invocation, "O open this day with the conch's moan, Omeros," is wonderful in its five-beat, anapest-decelerating-to-iambic grandeur (amplified by a thirteenth syllable). But how is one meant to hear lines like these, from Achille's African journey?

> So loaded with his thoughts, like a net with
> the clear
> and tasteless to him river-fish, was
> Achille—so dark
> that the fishermen avoided him. They
> brewed a beer
>
> which they fermented from a familiar bark
> and got drunk on it . . .

The rhythm wavers every which way—mimicking drunkenness perhaps?—and is not helped by the awkward adjectival phrase "clear and tasteless to him river-fish."

I would have welcomed more of the sort of formal variation that Walcott allows himself only rarely in *Omeros*, for example in the wonderful lyric that follows his description of finding himself shipwrecked in a Brookline "of brick and leaf-shaded lanes." The bruising trochaic tetrameters begin:

> House of umbrage, house of fear,
> house of multiplying air
>
> House of memories that grow
> like shadows out of Allan Poe
>
> House where marriages go bust,
> house of telephone and lust
>
> House of caves, behind whose door
> a wave is crouching with its roar
>
> House of toothbrush, house of sin,
> of branches scratching, "Let me in!"

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In such passages one detects the lineaments of a different poem, and in some ways a more ambitious one, in which Walcott is less determined to follow every cultural "rhyme" in his Antillean conflict, less intent on playing out its implications in his relentless hexameters. I suspect there will be other readers who find, as I did, that such layered weaving of divergent cultures becomes exasperating after a while. (Walcott associates Creeks—the Indian tribe—with Greeks, Homer's Achilles with Winslow Homer's shark-eluding, Achille-like fisherman in the great painting *The Gulf*.) I found myself looking forward to those moments in the poem when Walcott speaks, as he does in the Brookline sections, in what one has come to think of as his own voice, the world-weary but still wary voice of his book *Midsummer* (1984). It is the voice one hears in the epilogue of *Omeros*:

> I sang of quiet Achille, Afolabe's son,
> who never ascended in an elevator,
> who had no passport, since the horizon
> needs none,
>
> never begged nor borrowed, was nobody's
> waiter,
> whose end, when it comes, will be a death
> by water
> (which is not for this book, which will
> remain unknown
> and unread by him). I sang the only
> slaughter
> that brought him delight, and that from
> necessity—
> of fish, sang the channels of his back in the
> sun.
>
> I sang our wide country, the Caribbean
> Sea.

In his sixtieth year Derek Walcott has reached that stage of eminence when his greatest danger is to repeat himself. (If certain cardinals are said to be *papabile* or "Popeable," Walcott surely is Nobelable.) *Omeros* is a poem of great ambition, and yet it lacks the surefootedness and the verve of what remains Walcott's masterpiece, "The Schooner *Flight*." In trying to hold all the strands of his art in the palm of his hand, he has allowed some of them to slacken. Yet it's possible that in singling out certain passages for praise, one runs the risk of missing the forest for the pleasure afforded by a few shade trees. (Dante's first readers probably thought that he had managed a few good cantos in the *Commedia*.) *Omeros* has the sheer abundance and generosity one has come to expect of Walcott, and that is sufficient cause for celebration.

CHRISTOPHER BENFEY teaches at Mount Holyoke College and is completing a study of Stephen Crane to be published by Knopf.

Running for Cover

BY JOHN B. JUDIS

See How They Run: Electing a President in an Age of Mediaocracy by Paul Taylor

(Knopf, 281 pp., $22.95)

For Paul Taylor, political reporter for *The Washington Post*, the high point of the presidential campaign of 1988 came a year and a half before the actual election. On May 6, 1987, Taylor almost single-handedly forced Gary Hart out of the race, first by asking the candidate at a public press conference whether he had ever committed adultery, and then by pressing Hart in private, later that evening, about whether he was having an affair with a Washington woman. Hart withdrew rather than face the *Post*'s and Taylor's further questions about his personal life. Afterward, Taylor felt, he writes, "relieved, then triumphant."

The retelling of this sordid little episode takes up almost a quarter of Taylor's new book. This would not be unusual, except that the book purports to be about the 1988 election and the press's role in it, not simply about Taylor's own journalistic exploits. Taylor and his publisher—the advance publicity for the book plays up his famous question, "Have you ever committed adultery?"—seem to assume that his readers will be eager to relive those scenes.

Taylor's account of the episode lacks depth and candor, and it adds nothing significant to already published accounts. His analysis of the press and American politics is unabatingly superficial, relying on the transient musings of political consultants and pollsters. Moreover, except in the section about Hart, where Taylor's own honor is at stake, and a concluding section in which he presents a trifling proposal for reforming American politics, he avoids taking any point of view—a practice that might be appropriate to daily reporting, but is totally unsuitable in a book about an event that the author has had a chance to reflect upon, and to investigate at length.

Taylor describes his journalistic technique in terms that he borrows from Aristotle's ethics. "By aiming for the golden mean, I'll probably land near the best approximation of truth more often than if I were to be guided by any other set of compasses." In doing so, Taylor admits, "I'm taking a pass on the toughest calls I face." And take a pass he does. In the course of his book, Taylor exposes the patient reader to almost every $64 question about American politics and society—is the United States in decline? is Jesse Jackson a demagogue or a saint? is television a curse or a blessing?—without providing any clear answers.

Taylor's strategy is to state both sides of an argument and then, quite without regret, dodge the whole thing:

> It's beyond the scope of this book to untangle whether the Me-ism of the past two decades leaves us as impoverished and vulnerable as [Robert] Bellah and his colleagues assert or whether it's more accurately seen as a benign desire for control over one's life. . . . I'm unable to resolve in my own mind whether it's good or bad that this complicated relationship [between the press and its subjects] has been tilted so long in the "gotcha!" mode.

For a book about the press, moreover, there is also astonishingly little that is new about the press itself, and Taylor is an insider who could have shed some analytic light merely by relying on his memory. Instead, he virtually defines the subject out of existence by equating the press with himself and, by extension, with his fellow reporters. Publishers and editors rarely appear in his book, and owners are totally absent. Taylor dwells at length on his own exploits, for instance, but he never mentions the owner of *The Washington Post*, Katharine Graham, and her son Donald. The *Post*'s executive editor, Ben Bradlee, makes a cameo appearance in the Hart episode, but then he disappears from the stage, along with other senior editors. Taylor deals with television and other newspapers in the same way.

This omission, highly flattering to the author and his colleagues, creates a misleading impression of the press. It makes reporters seem like thoroughly autonomous subjects who dictate the way that the campaigns and the candidates are covered. They do, of course, to some extent. But the more complicated fact is that their power is inversely proportional

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to the importance, as it is perceived by the editors and publishers, of the events that the reporters are covering. (If some reporters retain a sense of complete autonomy, it is because they have internalized the norms, the biases, and the expectations of their superiors.) The reader wants to know: At what point did the owners or the top editors of the *Post* intervene in the daily coverage of the campaign? How were decisions made about what to feature and what not? Who was for whom? The same questions present themselves about the other media.

Taylor dismisses press critics who charge that the press has a bias. Such critics "are imputing ideological bias or intimidation to behavior that is more aptly explained by journalistic tendencies, rhythms, and operational needs." Yes and no. On the most mundane stories, the reporter's rhythms might prevail, but on the bigger story—say, how the *Post* is going to cover the Marion Barry trial—the editors and the publishers set the framework in which the reporters operate. This framework is not necessarily "right" or "left," "conservative" or "liberal," but it does help to determine the meaning of the events themselves. If Taylor wanted to write about the press and the campaign, he should have explored the framework he and his colleagues were operating in, or even identified it. Instead he plumbs his own persona ("as someone who's been on [Jesse Jackson's] call list . . .") for the answer.

What, then, of the two substantive contributions of Taylor's book? To evaluate Taylor on Hart, one has to trudge back into the details of the awful episode. On Sunday May 3, 1987, after staking out Hart's Washington, D.C., townhouse, *The Miami Herald* broke the story that Hart had spent the night with a model named Donna Rice. Two days later *The Washington Post* sprang into action. On a tip from a cuckolded husband, it obtained photos from a private investigator that suggested Hart was having an affair with a Washington woman. From what the *Post* learned of the affair, it seemed not to have been a one-night fling, but a quiet relationship.

Taylor was put on the case by his superiors, Bradlee, Leonard Downie, Robert Kaiser, and Ann Devroy. On May 7 Taylor confronted Hart at a press conference with the question of whether he had ever committed adultery, and then that evening, acting on orders from above, Taylor told Hart's press secretary that he wanted to ask Hart about his affair with the Washington woman. (Taylor's colleague, the late Bill Peterson, refused to join the hunt.) Rather than answer questions about the affair, Hart dropped out of the race. The *Post* never ran the story about the affair, even when Hart reentered the race seven months later.

There is a horde of questions about this matter, and not a single one of them is clearly answered in Taylor's book. Why did Taylor's superiors go after the Hart story? To sell papers? To knock off Hart? To pursue the unvarnished truth? By Taylor's own standards, Hart's affair did not qualify as a legitimate story. In distinguishing between stories that violate a politician's privacy and stories that do not, Taylor acknowledges that "being recklessly promiscuous is different from being quietly adulterous." This, clearly, was a case of the latter. Why, then, did the *Post* still stay on the story? Did the editors pursue it with a view to publishing the story and destroying someone else's reputation? Or did they pursue it because they had made a political decision that Hart was unfit for the presidency and were willing to use the conventions of daily reporting—and the labors of a reporter—to do him in? Taylor takes a pass on that question, too.

My own suspicions still run toward the editors playing politics. When I interviewed Bradlee in June 1987 for *The Columbia Journalism Review*, he told me that the *Post* had decided to pursue the story after Hart had attacked the press's credibility. "Much more than the Miami thing was his speech at the Publishers Association and at [former *New York Times* executive] Sydney Gruson's [fund-raiser] where he said he was being stabbed in the back by the press," Bradlee said. I concluded from Bradlee's candid avowal that this was really another case of the press using journalism to defeat one of its critics. At the same time, other sources suggested that the editors' enmity toward Hart as a candidate long predated the Gruson speech and had led to their decision to set Taylor on his trail. Whatever the case, the *Post* was not reporting or interpreting history, it was trying to change it. It was acting as a kind of surrogate candidate, doing the kind of dirty work that other campaigns do.

The *Post*'s and Taylor's behavior had repercussions well beyond Hart's campaign. It was one thing for *The Miami Herald* to monger scandal and quite another for the *Post*, one of the nation's two "papers of record." The *Post*'s actions legitimated a new level of intrusion into the personal lives of politicians. Its competitor, *The Washington Times*, has busied itself in the three years since the Hart story trying to dig up every scandalous instance of homosexual behavior in the capital (though not the homosexual scandals that would have involved fundraisers for the contras). And several *Post* journalists spent the summer of 1988 trying to establish whether George Bush was having a "quiet, adulterous affair." Even in this book Taylor cannot resist the temptation to stir up scandal, mentioning an alleged affair between Jackson and an actress.

When Taylor is not writing about how he skewered Hart, he is writing about how American politics has degenerated. Or rather, when he is not contributing to the degeneration of American politics, he is writing about it. The campaign, he writes, "was devoid of adventure, mission, vitality, or ideas." "The political dialogue is failing because the leading actors in the pageant of democracy—the politicians, the press, and the voters—are bringing out the least in one another." "Personality and image dominate politics the way party and ideology once did. This has everything to do with the ubiquity and intrusiveness of modern communications technology." The public didn't "reward candidates who took on the hard issues" like the budget deficit.

Having bemoaned the decline of politics, Taylor finally offers a solution. He wishes to force candidates during the last five weeks of the campaign to devote five minutes a night on national television to explaining their views. This will create a "new respect for politics," he concludes. But the punishment doesn't fit the crime. Worse, Taylor has the crime wrong. Like many Washington reporters and opinion analysts, Taylor is fixated on a contrast

Pope's Grotto

Verse's clarity, verse's vented bitterness
Could not free him from the Cave of Spleen,
Which he then domesticated. Retreating,
Between River and Garden, he dug out
His Grotto like a bloodworm, implanted
Cockles in the ceiling, and stayed, reading
In the indifferent light, only in late spring
When the cold departed as a threat
To his twisted bones. To burrow soothed him
As a kind of balm, an antidote to gossip;
It was better not to hear or know
What the gnats were calling you. From here
He held his eroding ground, kindling
The far, high fires of a grand rear guard
Against aguish drafts, numb phalanxes.

David M. Katz

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between a politics of image and a politics of ideology, between personality and hard issues. As used to be said of the women's vote, he thinks that voters choose candidates on the basis of how they look and talk. But there *were* serious issues in the campaign of 1988. Politicians and their consultants may not have used the most elevated themes and images to invoke these issues, but they were there. Willie Horton suggested crime and race—the darkness at the heart of many voters' fears. "Read my lips" was a stupid way of broaching the issue of raising taxes and spending more. There were "ideologies" that underlay these conflicting images, and that informed voters' final choices.

The real problem was not the absence of ideas and ideologies, but the kind of ideas and ideologies that have achieved prominence. If one takes the decline of American industry as the central fact of the last two decades—as a fact that will have repercussions well into the twenty-first century—then the problem with our campaigns has been the systematic evasion of this fact by both Democrats and Republicans, and the elevation of what are really secondary or tertiary issues such as abortion and capital punishment to prime time.

Why did this happen? It cannot be blamed entirely on television. This is an old pattern in American politics: in the 1920s, while America and the world were heading toward depression and war, much of the political debate was dominated by Prohibition. The pattern has more to do with Americans' dogged commitment to frontier individualism, with our flight from present predicaments to pursue a golden past. It also has to do with our corporate and financial elites' abdication of their national responsibilities, their willingness to sacrifice the national interest to private gain or glory. This elite includes, of course, the publishers, the editors, and the producers of the major media. And the situation cannot be corrected by daily five-minute speeches from candidates.

Taylor's book is the latest and (if we're lucky) one of the last in a string of quadrennial campaign books dating back to Theodore White's *The Making of the President, 1960*. What Taylor remembers about White's masterly work is "the story behind the story—i.e., what the adviser told the candidate on the morning of the big speech, and what brand of cigarettes they were each smoking at the time." But surely White also contributed—and studied at far greater length than he did a candidate's brand of cigarettes—the historical setting in which campaigns were taking place. *The Making of the President, 1964* contains one of the best discussions anywhere of the rise of the Republican right and of the origins of the civil rights movement. You won't find anything like that in Taylor's book, or in Jack Germond and Jules Witcover's once-over-lightlies, or in *Time*'s and *Newsweek*'s speed-of-light productions.

White understood that an election's significance lay well beyond what the press did, beyond even what the candidates said, and most certainly beyond whom they spent the night with. The same cannot be said of the latest pretenders to his legacy.

JOHN B. JUDIS is senior editor of *In These Times* and author of the forthcoming *Grand Illusion: Critics and Champions of the American Century* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux).

TRB *continued from page 4*

vestments. No doubt such people exist, and they are surely to be pitied. But they are hardly the key to a thriving economy. And the capital loss obsessives seem remarkably well dressed for such losers.

In truth the capital loss limitation affects a larger and more prosperous group: those who can arrange their affairs to generate capital losses while actually doing quite well, thank you. The key point about capital gains and losses is that you can choose when to take them. With no limit on capital losses, it would be easy for tax-shelter operators to create transactions that generate huge gains and losses in roughly equal amounts. You take the loss (thereby reducing the tax on your other income) and postpone the gain—perhaps indefinitely. *Et voilà!*

In one of its recent screeds, the *Journal* gave this game away. "If you allowed full deduction of losses, the capital gains tax probably wouldn't raise any revenue and might as well be abolished," it sneered. But surely the *Journal* does not envision an economy with no net capital profits. That would be an ironic result of taking *The Wall Street Journal*'s advice. What the *Journal* actually envisions is an economy with lots of profits, but no tax on them.

A Congressional Budget Office study concluded that cutting the top capital gains tax rate to 20 percent would increase private investment by—at most—all of $3.3 billion over five years, and have no discernible effect on GNP. The president's own Council of Economic Advisers claims a mere $61 billion cumulative GNP increase over five years. That's $12 billion a year, in a $5,000 billion economy. In short, a joke.

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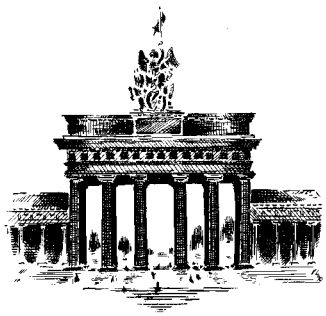
Oktoberfest

IN THE ORIGINAL VERSION BY Bismarck, German unification took three wars between 1864 and 1871—against Denmark, Austria, and France. Indeed, unification was proclaimed in the midst of war, and not in Berlin, the capital of the new Reich, but in Versailles—in the heart of occupied France, while besieged Paris was starving. Twenty-five kingdoms, duchies, principalities, and cities became *e pluribus unum* on January 18, 1871, but this process was hardly as benign as the fusion of the thirteen colonies in 1776.

THE LATE BRITISH HISTORIAN A. J. P. Taylor called Unification I the "conquest of Germany by Prussia." It was done by "blood and iron," with Bismarck's Prussia in the saddle. A famous painting by Anton von Werner provides the fitting metaphor. It depicts the king of Prussia, now Emperor William I, surrounded by the new Reich's princes and generals, who raise their drawn swords in salute. Not all of them were so happy as the painting tries to suggest. Reporting to his brother, the King of Bavaria, Prince Otto wrote: "Everything is so cold, so haughty, so glittery, so pompous—and pretentious, heartless, and empty."

NO SUCH HEROIC PAINTINGS WILL follow the remake in Berlin on October 3, when East Germany, that dismal experiment in Prusso-Socialism, collapsed westward into the Federal Republic of Germany. This is not a heroic age, and Germany is not a country of pomp and martial gestures. It was virtually business as usual, and the venue of the *Staatsakt* ("ceremony of state") was a thoroughly civilian locale—the Berlin Philharmonie, a concert hall that looks like an overblown Japanese tea house from the outside and the "Starship Enterprise" on the inside. No drawn swords and fancy uniforms here; just the drabness of gray and navy business suits. No *Deutschland über Alles*; just a little Bach, a smattering of Haydn, and the last two movements of Brahms's Second Symphony.

THE GERMANS ARE SAID TO BE A *gründlich* race—relentlessly efficient at anything they do. On this day they are relentlessly efficient at being nice. After a couple of musical intermezzos and speeches by dignitaries, a well-groomed man in his 40s strides to center stage, announcing that he is here to represent the voice of the common folk. How democratic, everybody thinks, leaning back in expectation of the vox populi. As it turns out, the speaker has not been invited, and the message, a garble of gibberish, was probably drafted in Wittenau, Berlin's answer to Bellevue. Since he is addressing the pillars of the German establishment—president, chancellor, ministers, and all—who are sitting fifteen feet away along a clear line of fire, you might think he would be instantly tackled by a horde of security men. In fact, he is at first politely asked to leave the stage—which he ignores. Nor does anyone yell for the police—the audience just unleashes a relentless wave of applause that drowns out the self-appointed people's spokesman. Only then is he firmly taken in hand and whisked off the dais. Germans and the world probably could not have wished for a better beginning. If somebody like our uninvited speaker could make it past the security checks all the way to the rostrum, then the Germans are no longer so efficient in the old business of building perfect police states.



THEY JUST WANT TO BE NICE, and lest anybody forget, they will say so with relentless repetition. Sabine Bergmann-Pohl, the former Speaker of the East German Parliament, stresses that there is "no nationalist exuberance" this time, and she pledges that "we will be Europeans as well as Germans." All speakers invoke the Holocaust, calling it, as does President Richard von Weizsäcker, "the most horrible of crimes" and vowing that "we will forever remember the victims." Never again, he proclaims, will the Germans fall for the "romantic search for a third way" between East and West, between authority and liberty. That is just an "illusion." And he earns the longest applause when he thanks our "allies and friends, above all the Americans, Britons, and French," for their "protection and support."

THE LADY, DOTH SHE PROTEST too much? Let us, as in real life, not question her avowals but scrutinize her circumstances. The issue of virtue simply does not arise when there is no temptation. Just as the October 3 remake bears no resemblance to the 1871 original, Germany '90 is not even a pale copy of the Wilhelminian Empire, the Weimar Republic, or the Third Reich. Germany is a boringly normal democracy, not a country where liberty is sacrificed to the Fatherland or trampled by jackboots. Nor does Germany '90 long for lebensraum and aggrandizement; indeed, most West Germans probably would have been perfectly happy to live with another German state *sine die*. And finally, as von Weizsäcker puts it: "For the first time, we Germans are not an issue of contention on the European agenda. Our unity has not been inflicted on anybody; it is the result of peaceful agreement." Yes, Germany will be bigger and stronger than anybody else on the European map, but unity was handed to the Germans, not conquered by them in a war of aggression. The only violence took place on the Alexanderplatz the night before, when an anti-unity demonstration, penetrated by the usual contingent of masked would-be urban guerrillas, erupted into a battle with the police.

WHAT WILL THE GERMANS DO with their clout, now that the fetters of the postwar order have fallen away as both Americans and Russians go home? The new game in Europe—exports rather than expansion, welfare rather than warfare—favors the Germans above all, and thus there is no temptation for them to change the rules back to the nastier days of yore. Nor do solidly bourgeois democracies beholden to the "pursuit of happiness," as Frau Bergmann-Pohl puts it in a bow to the Declaration of Independence, fall easily for the seductive tune of the Pied Pipers. When the *Staatsakt* in the Philharmonie was over, thousands again converged on the Reichstag, the towering building that once symbolized Germany's hapless quest for grandeur and power. Yet there were no speeches and no flags. Just mothers pushing their prams, and curious tourists from all over Germany swilling beer and Coke. It could have been the end of a baseball game where *neither* team lost. The Germans have been very lucky this time. But so, it seems, are Europe and the rest of the world. The sequel to "Blood and Iron" has a happy beginning.

JOSEF JOFFE

Josef Joffe, on leave from *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in Munich, is the Visiting Beton Michael Kaneb Professor of National Security Affairs at Harvard University.

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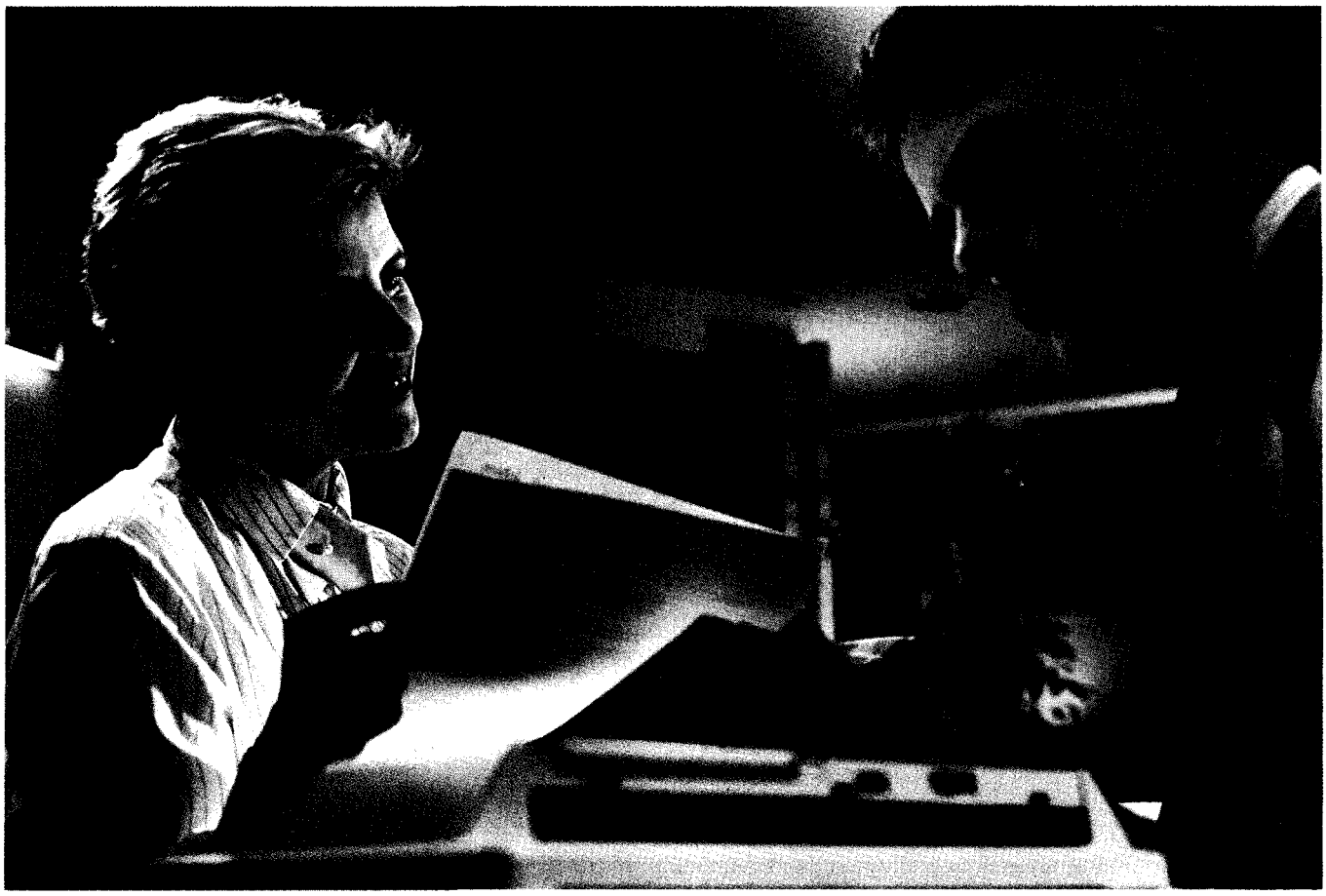

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